BLUES MATTERS!

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DOM MARTIN

INTERVIEWS WITH:

POPA CHUBBY
GUY DAVIS
LARRY MCCRAY
FRED CHAPELLIER
THE BLUES BAND
RONNIE EARL
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DELBERT MCCLINTON
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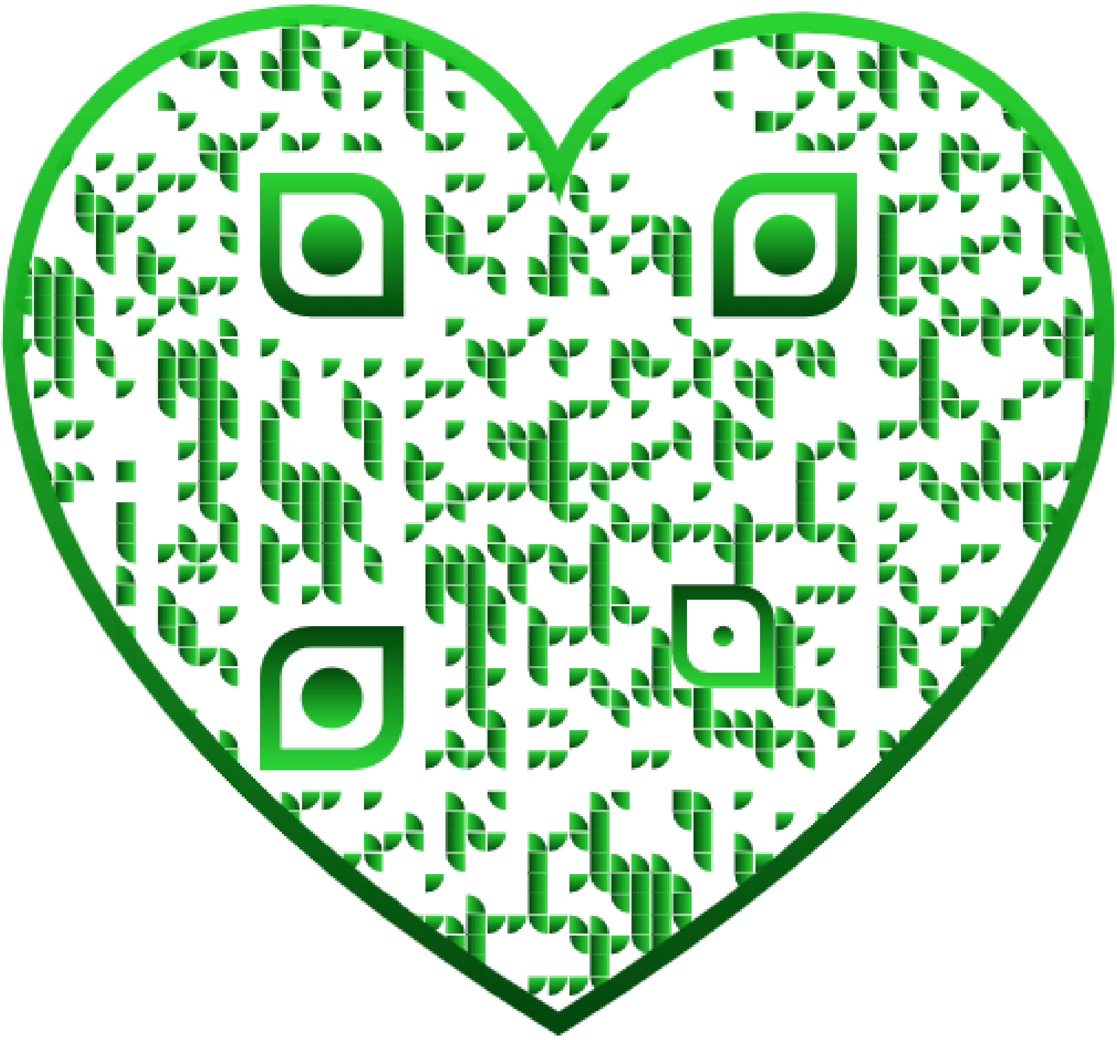

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BLUES MATTERS!
PO Box 4820, STOKE ON TRENT, ST3 4PU

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/OWNER:
Iain Patience: editor@bluesmatters.com

ALBUM REVIEW EDITOR/OWNER:
Stephen Harrison: reviews@bluesmatters.com

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:
ads@bluesmatters.com

DESIGN & WEBSITE MANAGER:
design@bluesmatters.com

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Contributing Writers:

Bruce Alexander
John Angus
Tim Arnold
Roy Bainton
Eric Baker
Steve Banks
Adrian Blacklee
Eddy Bonte (Bel)
Colin Campbell
Laura Carbone
Norman Darwen
Paul Davies
Dianne Dodsworth
Dave Drury
Ben Elliott
Barry Fisch
Sybil Gage
Stuart A. Hamilton
Stephen Harrison
Trevor Hodgett
Barry Hopwood
Andy Hughes
Stacey Jeffries
Yvette Jenkins
Rowland Jones
Adam Kennedy
Jean Knappitt
Brian Kramer
Frank Leigh
Andy Lindley
Gian Luca
Ben McNair
John Mitchell
Glenn Noble
Toby Ornott
David Osler
Iain Patience
Dom Pipkin
Sharon Ponsford
Simon Redley
Darrell Sage Paromita
Saha-Killelea
Glenn Sargeant
Dave Scott
Graeme Scott
Jon Seymour
Andy Snipper
Dave Stone
Matty T. Wall
Don Wilcock
Dani Wilde
Steve Yourglivch

Contributing Photographers:

Arnie Goodman (USA), Adam Kennedy (UK), Laura Carbone (USA) plus others credited on page.

COVER IMAGE:

Jim Heal

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Editor in Chief's comment

WELCOME to BM 125

Well, here we are again with issue 125. Not the easiest to prepare and publish in the most tragic of circumstances.

As many will probably now know, our founder and editor-in-chief, Alan Pearce, passed recently, in late January. 'Our Leader,' as those of us onboard warmly and jokingly called him, was a true 'blues-nut.' Always worried about whether the music was 'blues' and what our readers might think, he was a huge fan and supporter of bands and artists globally, with a determination to push Blues Matters forward at every twist and turn on the blues highway.

He will be missed by so many, many of whom agree that they owe at least part of their careers to his tenacity and encouragement. So, we feature a fitting Obituary by our Steve Yourglvich, a former Features Editor, and long-time friend, together with tributes from a few others.

To continue Alan's legacy, a few of us have stepped up to the plate, continuing the tradition and title he loved so much. So, rest assured, your favourite magazine will remain focussed and continue to push forward in the years ahead with the same determination and dedicated team of great writers and blues-lovers at the helm.

Iain Patience

Raising money for Cancer Research

Alan was no stranger to cancer, having battled it and won more than once. We are raising funds for Cancer Research UK in is his name. Please give if you are able! https://fundraise.cancerresearchuk.org/page/alan-pearce-blues-matters

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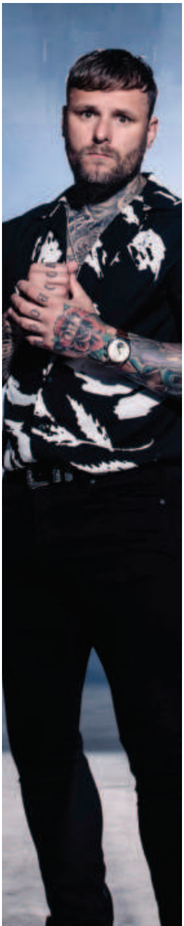
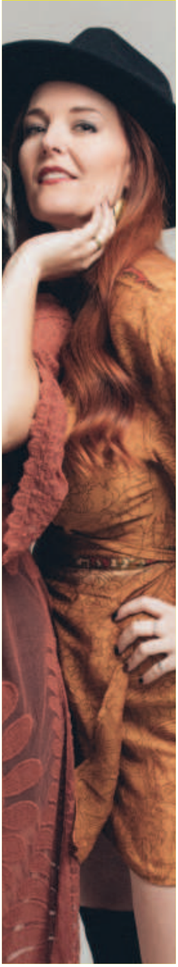

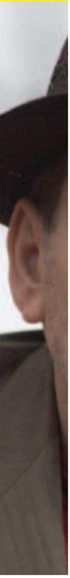

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DOM MARTIN

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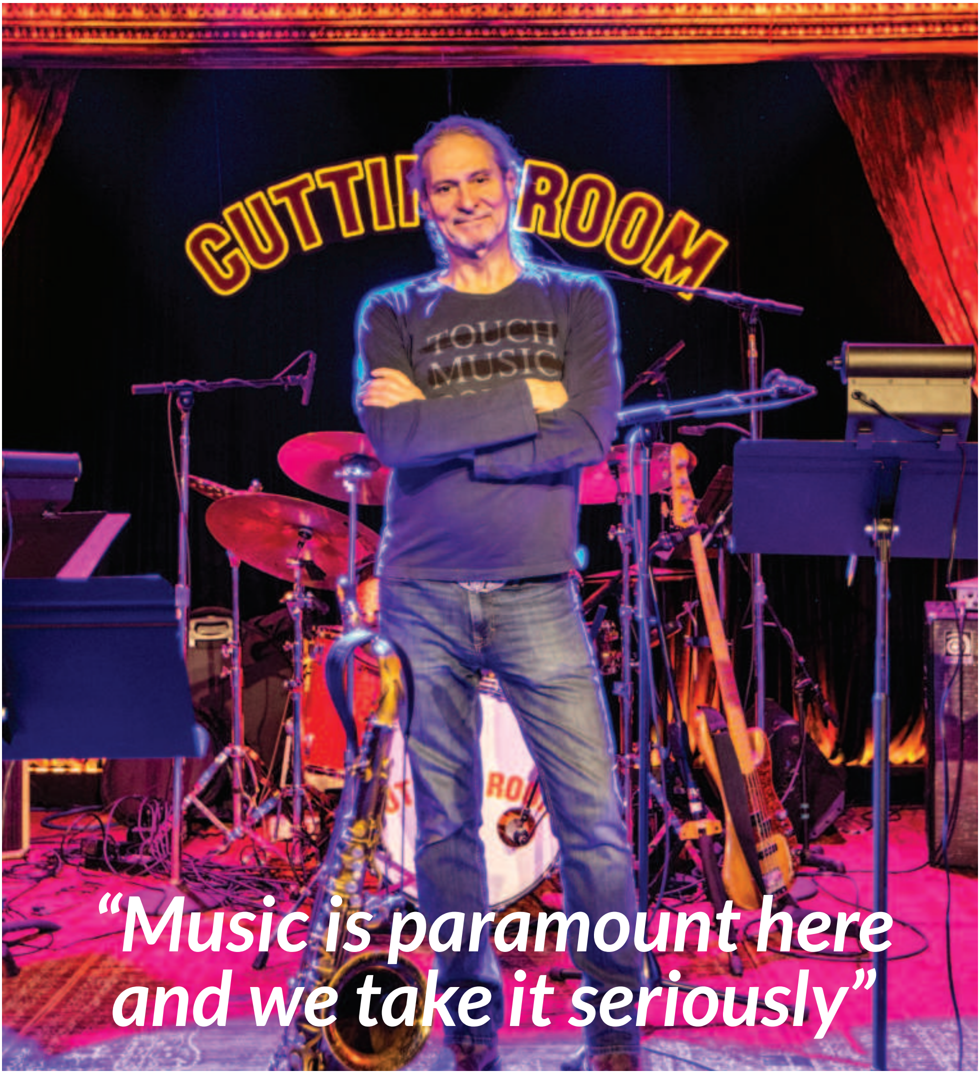
"We must have done something bad. I couldn't get a gig under name of Savage. Martin is my confirmation name. It's the Catholic thing, I'm not part of that."

ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

WITH CLUB OWNER STEVE WALTER

by Abbe Sparks Images: Arnie Goodman



“Music is paramount here and we take it seriously”

For more than 20 years The Cutting Room (TCR) has been one of New York City's pre-eminent live music venues and a place where the Blues stays alive. The iconic music club first opened its doors in late 1999 in the Chelsea area and operated there through January 2009. Looking for a slightly larger space, Owner Steve Walter reopened The Cutting Room at the beginning of 2013 in a new location at 44 East 32nd Street, where it has remained ever since. One of the first acts to play at the new location was Ronnie Wood and Mick Taylor in a tribute to Jimmy Reed with four nights of sold-out shows.

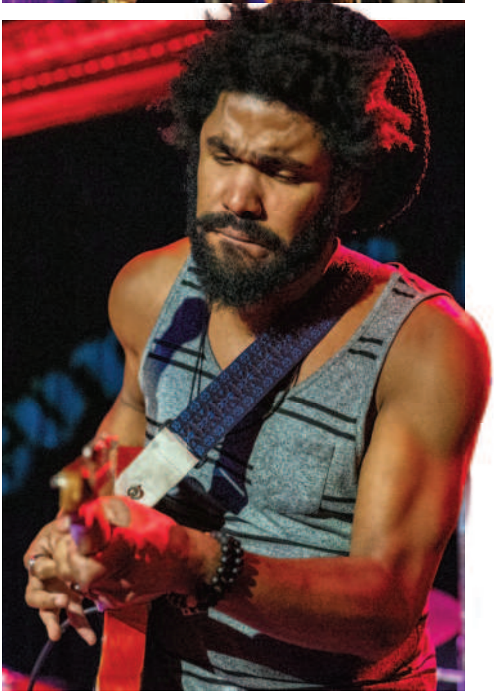
A MUSICIAN'S MECCA

The Cutting Room is a musician's mecca, owned and operated by a musician who clearly gets it. "We take music seriously,' says Steve. "I'm a gearhead. Musicians love to play the Cutting Room because we talk to them in their own language."

The new, larger Cutting Room has a 280 seated capacity with 480 standing room. There's an option for a more intimate setting of 180 seated when the movable wall separating the bar from the live room is closed. TCR is adorned with a 45-foot hand carved Stratocaster bar and a 15-foot chandelier made of stained glass and 18 electric guitars. That removable wall between the bar and the live room offers perfect sight lines. There is also a 16-foot projection screen in the front bar and 10-foot screen behind the stage capable of playing any type of media. Additionally, there is the 28' x 16' stage, state of the art sound and lighting, and a full backline complete with Baby Grand piano, Hammond organ, 5 drum sets, 7 guitar amps, full percussion: congas, and more.

ABOUT STEVE WALTER

Club owner Steve Walter is a graduate of Berklee College of Music. He is an avid guitar collector and has over 30 varieties in his collection. Favorite guitars to play - Les Paul Strat Telecaster, Gibson. If you're lucky, you can



catch Steve up on stage joining the act. If you're lucky…

Growing up in a musical town had its perks. An appreciation of live music has run through Steve's veins since he was a teenager. The Asbury Park native began working at The Sunshine Inn live music club at age 14. Steve was responsible for the lighting. This now closed venue is where he learned firsthand the inner workings of a club. Some of the musicians he saw while at the Sunshine Inn include Steve Miller, Humble Pie, Rory Gallagher, Edgar Winter, Richie Havens and Savoy Brown.

"As a teen I got to see BB King live at Asbury Park with James Cotton opening, and in 1971 I saw Johnny Winter and Rick Derringer together. They were amazing!"
Favorite artists that influenced Steve -- "In those days, Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page; and then you have Rory Gallagher, Roy Buchanon, Peter Bench, Ron Ackerman… You know who's a great blues band when I was young? Climax Blues Band with Pete Haycock. He's a great guitarist; a great player. I lit them at The Sunshine Inn.

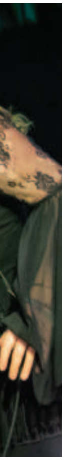
THE CUTTING ROOM BOASTS A CELEBRATED ROSTER OF BLUES LEGENDS AND NEXT GENERATION BLUES ARTISTS

Stepping onto The Cutting Room stage over the years is a celebrated roster of legendary Blues artists and there are no signs this practice will stop anytime soon (despite Covid). The iconic music and supper club has featured Blues greats including B.B. King, Hubert Sumlin, Bobby Rush, Ronnie Wood, Mick Taylor, Al Kooper, Simon Kirke, Leon Russell, Jimmy Webb, William Bell, Stanley Jordon, Joe Cocker, Steve Earle, Kim Simmonds, Savoy Brown, Fog Hat, Joe Lewis Walker, Murali Coreole, Steve Cropper, Lou Marini, Joe Bonamassa, Keb Mo, Robert Cray, Kenny Wayne Shephard, Kingfish, Jon Paris and Jimmy Vivino. The list goes on and on. A few of the Blues cats from across the

pond include Samantha Fish, Anna Popovich, Deborah Bonham and Peter Bullick (Bonham-Bullick) and Davey Knowles. There are also the next generation blues artists who have played there including Gary Clarke, Jr., Betts Allman, Marcus King and Taz.

THE RONNIE WOOD/ MICK TAYLOR GIG

How did the Ronnie Wood, Mick Taylor gig come about in 2013?
Steve: "Ronnie and I met through a mutual friend. I just picked up the phone, called him on his cell and asked him to come play at the club. He was into the idea and that was it. He chose to use the opportunity to create a tribute to



Jimmy Reed. It was Ronnie and Mick plus the guys that filled out their band were Al Kooper on keys, Wilbur Bascomb on bass and Simon Kirke on drums. Gary Clarke, Jr. sat in for a song or two, as well. They played four sold-out shows at The Cutting Room. We couldn't have done it without British Airlines.

HOW IS BRITISH AIRLINES INVOLVED IN THIS GREAT SHOW OF LEGENDS?

Steve: "At the time, the British Airlines office was across the street from us and I became friendly with those guys. When they heard that Ronnie Wood and Mick Taylor were coming to New York City to play at our club, they offered to fly them in gratis."

THE PANDEMIC AND IN-HOUSE LIVE STREAMING AT THE CUTTING ROOM

The venue has a top notch sound engineer and lighting designer that everybody raves about. I can honestly attest to this as I have put on my own show there. In addition, TCR offers all the visual effect bells and whistles a musician could ever want for their gig.

The only bonus of the pandemic is that TCR is now fully set up for Live Streaming in house; so no need to coordinate with outside sources. "Yes, we began that during the pandemic," says Steve. Our lighting guy and sound engineer are the crème of the crop when it comes to all things technical. "If someone comes to us last minute and says they want to stream It on their Facebook page, we can do that now in a pinch," adds TCR Sound Engineer Gerard Hoffman.
You were very lucky that The Cutting Room survived the pandemic because a lot of clubs didn't make it. "One very good reason is that we have a great landlord," says Steve. "Also the Shuttered Venues Operator Grant helped. We are very lucky. Our staff all returned which is so great. We're a family here."

That family vibe is yet another reason why musicians love to play The Cutting Room. At the end of the day, the Cutting Room is truly a musician's mecca.

For booking, contact The Cutting Room: bookings@cuttingroom.com.
Visit **www.thecuttingroomnyc.com**

REMEMBERING ALAN PEARCE 1950 - 2022

STEVE YOURGLIVCH:

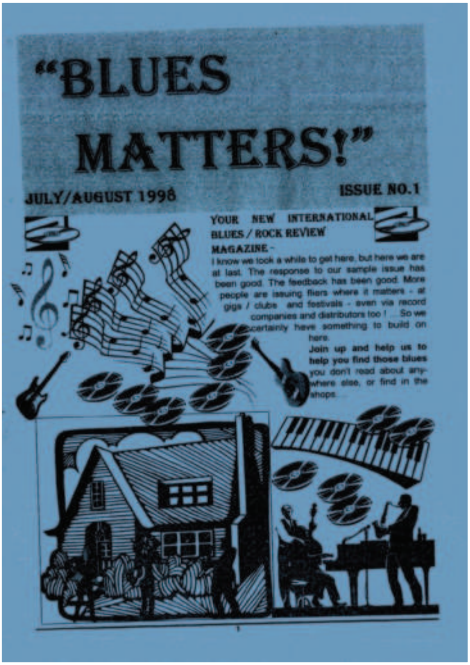
The world of Blues lost an important component on the day that Alan Pearce shimmied his way into Jaks Juke Joint, the heavenly blues club where Wolf and Muddy now share top billing.

None of us should have been surprised at Alan's passing, he had battled ill health for as long as most of us had known him. But his stubborn resilience in the face of insurmountable odds had seen him defy defeat countless times in the past. That same defiance and hard headedness was part of the driving force that enabled him to create a magazine that started out as a humble fanzine celebrating the music of Savoy Brown and became an internationally recognised leader in its field. Equally important, Alan had a vast knowledge of his subject and a burning passion that remained undimmed to the end. His thirst for discovering new talent and helping them to gain some recognition was legendary. At heart he was a people person. It wasn't only budding musicians but also enthusiastic writers he gave an opportunity to. I know, I was one.

Alan talked a lot about his early years, travelling around the country as his father was in the RAF, having joined up straight from school and going on to be awarded an MBE. Alan was rightly very proud of him. Instead of following him into the services though Alan spent many years as a civil servant working for the DHSS ensuring as many people as possible received the support and opportunities they deserved. It's that people

person again. But the music had always been there, from the age of 5 he was listening to the family radiogram while his parents watched TV and his first weeks wages were blown on a Czech made portable record player.

Savoy Brown and, in particular, Kim Simmonds became his hero's and it was meeting Kim after a gig and talking for almost 4 hours into the early hours that inspired Alan to begin writing about the music he loved. Anyone who has spoken on the phone to Alan about blues will know a 4 hour conversation wouldn't be a problem for him! What might surprise some is that his other passion was Wild West novels and he had quite a collection. The best legacy all of us can create for Alan is to make certain that Blues Matters! (the ! was always important to him) doesn't ride off into the sunset. Somehow I don't think it will.


"BLUES MATTERS!"
JULY/AUGUST 1998 ISSUE NO.1
YOUR NEW INTERNATIONAL BLUES / ROCK REVIEW MAGAZINE -
I know we took a while to get here, but here we are at last. The response to our sample issue has been good. The feedback has been good. More people are issuing fliers where it matters - at gigs / clubs and festivals - even via record companies and distributors too ! ... So we certainly have something to build on here.
Join up and help us to help you find those blues you don't read about anywhere else, or find in the shops.

ISSUE 1 OF BLUES MATTERS

ASHWYN SMYTH (UK BLUES FEDERATION):

I've known Alan for the best part of 20 years and for me he has always been a friend, a confidant, wise counsel and great for sounding off ideas.

All through those twenty years, we had frequent lengthy telephone conversations and so nearly met up numerous times but never actually manage it.

From the word go, Alan was hugely supportive of my Digital Blues radio shows and the early concept behind them of promoting home grown blues as 'the voice of the blues for Essex'. He invited me to write reviews of albums, gigs, festivals over the years for the magazine and we would often discuss his plans for Blues Matters! and his dogged determination to make it a success shone through.

As a founder member of the European Blues Union, he and I worked together to raise the profile of UK blues in Europe with, and, at times, in spite of the EBU.

When, in April 2015, I decided to create the UKBlues Federation to provide a focal point for blues in the UK, Alan supported me giving me the benefit of his own experiences and encouraging me. I remember him saying how pleased he was that I was doing something he had wanted to do for years but could never find the time to do! I also remember his prophetic words 'You don't know what you are taking on! It will take over your life!'

As the Federation took on the mantle of selecting a UK representative at the European Blues Challenge and, for the first time, at the International Blues Challenge, Alan was there supporting our efforts despite the fact that what we were doing took away the role Blues Matters! had filled.

But he was as happy as we were when the UK twice won the European Blues Challenge – 2017 with Kaz Hawkins and 2019 with Kyla Brox.

Sadly, I cannot remember the last time we actually talked on the phone – we kept on saying we must, but something always got in the way. Now it won't happen, and I will miss so very much our wide-ranging and sometimes very frank conversations

It is particularly poignant that his last e-mail to me, little more than a month before he passed, finished with these words: *'My, my how long is it since we had a chat???????? I delegate work yet seem to be even busier. I do spend less time in HQ but we are still growing........oh, will it never end? NO, there's always the Blues!!'*

R.I.P. Alan et bon voyage !

ARNIE GOODMAN (PHOTOGRAPHER):

My introduction to Alan Pearce came in late 1996 with him introducing himself as the owner of a new magazine called Shades of Savoy Brown. Our true connection was Savoy Brown and Kim Simmonds. At that time I was running Viceroy Music which recorded Savoy Brown. I also had previously managed Savoy Brown.

Alan's proudest moment was when he got Savoy Brown placed into Record Collectors top ten Blues Rock Bands. Shades of Savoy Brown was done strictly for the love of the band.
The next chapter in Alan's life came in 1998 when he decided to start Blues Matters magazine, (incidentally, the title of a Savoy Brown album was Blues Matter).

I remember Isuue#1 like it was yesterday. That issue was printed on blue paper and was basically stapled together. Over the years, the magazine has evolved into a world class product. My first meeting in person with Alan came sometime in late 1998.

He came to London to meet me at the Station Tavern to see Innes Sibun. We spend several days discussing music and the future of Blues Matters. One of my proudest moments for Alan was when Blues Matters won the Keeping the Blues Award from the National Blues Foundation in Memphis. Alan gave me the honor of receiving the award for him. When Blues Matters reached Issue #100 -March 2018 – he had Kim Simmonds on the cover reflecting his never-ending dedication to Savoy Brown. Alan gave me the honor of shooting the cover. It is Alan's dedication that has brought Blues Matters to April 2022 - Issue #125.

Alan Pearce was a humble and respectful man, who devoted Blues Matters to honoring the power and beauty of the music. It was never a labor of ego or narcissism-which begets many publications today.

Personally, I will forever miss Alan for our true music connection and above all, our true friendship.

My hope is that Blues Matters will prevail in the future, and keep his legacy ongoing.

IAN POTTER (DESIGNER FOR BM):

Alan had an infectious personality. His relentless optimism kept him going through any problems that may have arisen during production and he would always smile on our many video chats, regardless of what he was going through.

He would show interest in how I was doing and would remember the small things I'd told him the week before, asking for progress reports regularly.

I'll miss our chats, the emails with far too many exclamations marks... but overall I'll miss his smile the most!

PHENOMENAL BLUES WOMEN

by Dani Wilde

MERRY CLAYTON

"I started with Bobby Darin. He signed me to Capital when I was 15. I was 14, getting ready to be 15. And then the next encounter I had was with, I think, Peggy Lee. I sang background with The Blossoms, with Darlene Love. And then I went to Ray Charles, and then I left Ray, and I went to Lou Adler. I sang with Carole King, James Taylor, Neil Young, Elvis Presley, The Bee Gees. Who else? I'm drawing a blank here." Merry Clayton in a 2013 interview with NPR Radios.

Who else indeed! Merry Clayton is the soulful backup singer whose emotive voice you will have heard throughout the decades on records and live performances from The Supremes to Coldplay, and so many in between! Her most memorable vocal performance is no doubt the chorus of The Rolling Stones 'Gimme Shelter' where she sings the gritty lyric "Rape, Murder, Is just a shot away!" with gospel infused passion, rock and roll angst, and soulful integrity. Whilst Jagger's vocal performance on this track is one of my absolute favourites, it's Clayton's voice that transforms the song, making it the huge success that it is!

Merry Clayton would recall how having just come off the road with Ray Charles, she was asleep in bed when she got a phone call in the middle of the night from The Stones producer Jack Nietzsche, who asked her to come and sing a back up vocal on a track called 'Gimme Shelter'. Clayton hadn't heard of The Rolling Stones before, but she new Jack Nietzsche and trusted him when he told her that "I really think this would be something good for you." Heavily pregnant at the time, Clayton got up and made her way to the studio still in her silk pyjamas, where she was met by Keith Richards and Mick Jagger.

"They had the lyrics for me. I said, well, that's cool. So, I did the first part. It was rather high, but I did the first part. And we got down to the rape, murder part, and I said, well, what? Why am I singing rape, murder?" 2013 interview with Terry Gross

It was 1969 and the song reflected the political unrest at that time; the Vietnam war, race riots and the Charles Manson murders.

"It's very much about the awareness that war is always present" Mick Jagger would explain… "it was very present in life at that point. Merry Clayton who did the backing vocals, was a background singer who was known to one of the producers. Suddenly, we

wanted someone to sing in the middle of the night. And she was around. She came with her curlers in, straight from bed, and had to sing this really odd lyric… She was great."

Having sung a first take, Clayton lay down two more vocal tracks, this time an octave higher and really connecting with the lyric. Her voice cracked a little on the word 'Murder' which only added to the emotional intensity, and if you listen closely, you can hear Mick Jagger hollering 'Whoo!' in the background, blown away by her vocal performance!

After the success of Gimme Shelter, Merry Clayton became even more in demand as a session singer; now rock musicians who wanted a gospel feel wanted her too. Sadly though, for many years Clayton couldn't bear to listen to that recording. Shortly after the session she suffered a miscarriage that she put down to the exertion of singing, and opening the heavy studio doors. She was heartbroken. Despite this, in 1970, she confronted the song, recording her own version which became the title track of her debut solo album. Her version of Gimme Shelter reached the No. 73 on the pop charts.

Merry, who was given her name because she was born on Christmas Day in 1948, had an incredible musical upbringing. Her Father was a Minister at his Baptist Church in New Orleans. He loved to sing, and the church's musical reputation was such that when the likes of Sam Cooke and The Soul Stirrers were passing through town, they would come and visit and perform. Every Sunday Morning her father would invite a guest singer and Merry would recall how "Many mornings, I would find myself sitting on a pew with Mahalia Jackson. I would lean over on Mahalia Jackson to go to sleep on her arm. And I'd put my feet up on Linda Hopkins, you know…"

Young Merry was in awe of Mahalia. As a six year old, she would mimic everything Mahalia Jackson sang. Her Father's church safely introduced her to a world of show business and helped her to find her own sound, vocal chops and contacts both in religious and secular music circles. At the age of 14, she was offered the opportunity to sign a record contract with Bobby Darrin for Capital Records. Her Mother agreed so long as she kept on top of her homework; and so after the school day she would be picked up and taken to the recording studio.

"I sang with Carole King, James Taylor, Neil Young, Elvis Presley, The Bee Gees."

In 1963, Clayton stepped up from her back up singing position to that of 'guest lead vocalist', joining Bobby Darrin for a duet on the track "Who can I count on if I can't count on you". I love how the track starts quite tame with Darrin's first verse, and then when Clayton begins singing in Verse 2, the song is propelled to a whole other level of greatness that seems to make Darrin up his game in his 3rd Verse.

By 1968, Merry Clayton was a well known and sought after session singer. Folk Rocker Neil Young hired her to sing on several tracks on his debut album. Clayton became a fan of Young's powerful songwriting and in 1971, she covered his civil rights protest song 'Southern Man' on her self-titled album. Southern Man addresses the history of slavery and the racism of its aftermath. Young calls upon the White Southerners who made their fortunes from slavery to try to make amends:

"I saw cotton and I saw black,
tall white mansions

and little shacks.
Southern Man,
when will you pay them back?"

Clayton's cover version steers away from the folk-rock vibe of the original, instead laying down a funky groove with brass accompaniment. Her voice is raw, gritty, intense, and full of soul as she connects with the desperation of the lyric and amplifies the emotion with deep integrity. You can hear her gospel roots, but in her passion she transcends beyond them, her vocal reaching peaks where she is almost screaming, like a female James Brown – It's fantastic stuff! You can see some wonderful live performances Clayton made of this track in the early seventies on YouTube, and it's hard to understand how she wasn't far more successful as a solo artist. That being said, the album reached number 36 on the US R&B Charts.
Ironically, a few years after her release of Southern Man, Clayton agreed to a vocal session singing back up on Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama".

The song was written in response to Neil Young's "Southern Man", as Skynyrd felt Young had wrongly taken the whole of the South to task for the bloody history of slavery and racism. The song became an Anthem for the South which Lynyrd Skynyrd would perform at their concerts in front of the confederate flag. Young is even name-checked in the lyrics:

"Well, I heard Mister
Young sing about her
Well, I heard ol' Neil
put her down
Well, I hope Neil
Young will remember
A Southern man don't need him
around anyhow"

"We thought Neil was shooting all the ducks in order to kill one or two," said Skynyrd band member Ronnie Van Zant at the time.

The song lyrics also cite George Wallace, the then Governor of Alabama who supported racial segregation.

"In Birmingham, they love the governor (boo boo boo)"

The mention of Birmingham is significant as it is where in 1963, in response to Martin Luther King's civil rights protests, the KKK bombed a black church, killing four little girls. Clayton would recall how when she got the phone call asking her to sing back up on the controversial track, she didn't want to take the session.

"I said four little girls lost their lives, and it just broke everyone's heart. I said I don't want to sing anything to do with Alabama!"

But then, she realised that she could use her voice to tell her own truth. In an interview she explained: "That was part of our protest – You know, we couldn't stand on the front line but we could certainly sing Sweet Home Alabama with all of our hearts and souls".

And so, it is Clayton's beautiful gospel voice you hear booing the Governor on the track. However you interpret Skynyrd's questionable and contraversial lyrics, Clayton's presence on the track is a personal protest against racism.

Throughout her career, Merry Clayton maintained her status as one of the most sought-after black session singers in popular music. She worked with Burt Bacharach, Tom Jones, Joe Cocker, Linda Ronstadt, Carole King and Elvis Presley, to name just a few! Despite so many listeners enjoying her voice singing back up on all of these great records, many music fans, myself included, didn't have a name to put to that great voice; not helped by the fact that The Stones had miscredited her as 'Mary Clayton' on their record! In 2013, that changed, with the release of the documentary film 20 Feet from Stardom. This fantastic movie gives an insight to the lives and careers of top session singers. It won an Oscar for best documentary, and won the 2015 Grammy Award for Best Music Film. Having seen the movie, I was quick to look up Clayton's three fantastic solo albums that she released throughout

the 1970s and I recommend you do the same!

In June 2014, tragedy struck. Clayton was critically injured in a car collision in Los Angeles California. Thankfully she survived, but she had to have both of her legs amputated at the knees. I cannot begin to imagine how tough that would be, both mentally and physically, but what amazed me was the phenomenal strength that Clayton showed to get back out there and carry on making music. The moment her surgeon awakened her and advised her of what had happened, she responded: “Doctor, I may not now have all my body parts…but I still have this voice!”

The year after the accident, Clayton was featured on two tracks on Coldplay’s multi-million selling album A Head Full of Dreams. The album ends with an uplifting anthem called Up and Up where vocalist Chris Martin sings:

“Fixing up a car to drive in it again, when you’re in pain When you think you’ve had enough, Don’t ever give up”

It’s almost as if the song was written for, or about Clayton, who gives a spiritual feel to the track contributing some awesome gospel adlibs.

In 2021, Clayton signed to Motown and her fourth solo album Beautiful Scars was released. Seven years after the accident that almost took her life, she shows just what an amazing strong spirit she has, with a beautiful record that tells her inspirational story.

“I wear it proud, like a badge. I wear it like a tattoo” (Clayton quoted lyrics from the title track in a recent interview with NPR), Well, that’s my story. Because my scars are beautiful…If you make it through anything in life.. that’s your victory right there.”

The future of Blues Matters!

Alan’s passing was a huge blow to the magazine as it was very much his “baby” for the last 22 years.

The great news is that **we have full intentions of keeping this publication, and the blues, very much alive!** We appreciate all the support the writers, photographers, bands, artists, record labels etc have given us so far and can’t wait to continue our relationships with everyone.

And of course, YOU, our readers - we literally can’t do what we do without our readers so a huge THANK YOU for sticking with us! If you’re not a subscriber, this would be a great time to sign up and help us keep Blues Matters moving forward. **www.bluesmatters.com/subscribe**

- The Blues Matters team

“Sending good wishes to Iain and all my friends at Blues Matters. I’m pleased to hear that you’re keeping it going!”

- John Mayall

IMAGE: David Gomez

THE *story* BEHIND THE SONG
STRANGE FRUIT

There are, of course, many songs within the blues that have a dark side. Virtually all blues songs tell a tale of woe and a sense of loss in one way or another. A dark side may come from a true story, maybe less well known, but still playing a pivotal role within blues and society in equal measure. Strange Fruit is one such song.

by **Stephen Harrison** Images: **Arnie Goodman**

Released in 1939, written by Abel Meerpool, Strange Fruit, embodies everything that is abhorrent about the suffering that black people endured, and to a large extent, still endure today. The song was adapted from a poem detailing the horrors of slavery, and more importantly, hanging. As history continues to tell us, these atrocities were part of everyday life in America, especially in the Deep South.

The song, highlights the harrowing tale of lynchings, of lynch mobs, and of how this affected black Americans in a time when slavery and segregation were norms. There are, however, differing opinions as to what the story was actually about.

What is not in dispute is the fact that Billie Holiday was, and still is synonymous with this song. One theory regarding the song is that Billie Holiday witnessed a member of her family hanging from a tree, leading her to use the song as a protest throughout her life, ultimately leading to spells in prison. Billie Holiday used the oppression of black people to such an extent that she blamed the death of her father, from lung cancer, because he was not allowed treatment due to the colour of his skin.

Strange Fruit became a well-known protest song within the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s, covered by many blues artists. But it was Billie Holiday who gave the song creedence and stature for her entire recording career. Many say that because of the effects on her health - particularly her mental well-being - her untimely death at the age of 44 years was largely down to what she supposedly witnessed.

Whatever the true story behind the song, I have my own theory on this, the dreadful scene that was attested to still needs to be discussed and heeded as much today as it did back then. If this had been an isolated incident, it would have been horrific, but this was a daily occurrence in the Deep South of America. As time has passed, the true meaning of the song may have lost its momentum somewhat but for the resurgence of the song by many different artists.

When I interviewed Beth Hart in November 2021, we discussed many things relating to her

career. I was keen to ask her what she felt about the song, her performance of Strange Fruit for me is the greatest and most humble and soul-searching versions I have ever heard. Beth explained she has to get into the mind of Billie Holiday to sing that song, to put herself at the foot of the tree looking at the black people hanging there...

To do this, Beth explained made this the most difficult song to perform, often reducing her to tears. As we continued our chat about blues history and the terrible things that happened, it seemed we had forged a bond between us because we both knew the true history of blues music; we felt it, we understood it, we live it.

It was the most heartwarming and heart-wrenching interview I have ever conducted because we had both understood what the blues truly means and what events brought people to howl and wail, to play the blues just to ease their pain. Every time that I heard the song before, it had overwhelmed me because this lies at the heart of blues and American culture in the 1800s and beyond, into the 1900s.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulgin'eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burnin' flesh

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather
For the wind to suck
For the sun to rot
For the tree to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop

BILLIE HOLIDAY 1915-1959

Seeing Beth Hart perform this, as I have done four times now, leaves me teary-eyed to the point of wanting to delve deeper into the dark history of blues music and the songs with stories to tell that shock you to the core in more ways than one. This is not about a great blues artist singing a song that was written in 1939, this is the story of something that should never be forgotten. If that means it is taught in schools then so be it, on both sides of the Atlantic.

The steps that were taken to eradicate this song from history go as far as it being banned from the radio, being turned down by record companies for fear of offending white Southern customers. When these measures are taken it goes to prove that many don't want the truth to be told. A lesson to us all.

WHY I HATE JAM SESSIONS

by **Rowland Jones** Images: **Supplied**

THE JAM SESSION The spontaneous symbiosis of multiple musical minds creating empathetic harmonies, infectious rhythms and breathtakingly beautiful melodies. Yes? Well pretty unlikely to be honest – more often than not it'll be musical mayhem, consisting of egomaniacs battling with every ounce of their being, to dominate the stage with more notes in one number than B.B. King played in his entire career and at a volume that even Felix Pappalardi would find painful.

For those who are not familiar with Felix - he was, amongst many other things, the notoriously loud bass player with Mountain who eventually blew his own hearing out of existence. Unfortunately he's also dead, as his wife took my metaphor a stage further and shot him dead. Now whether this is associated with his loud playing or not is unclear but it maybe a serious warning to any 'volume heads' out there who think that the only level that works is 11!

Another thing that the 'JAManiacs' have in common is that though they profess to admire the work of their heroes, they seem to make no effort to emulate their musicality. I wish they would just listen and take in what is going on in some of the great jams on the net, which are joy to see and hear – B.B. King being absolutely gobsmacked by Derek Trucks' solo is wonderful.

The essential feature of these classic jams is how every participant is allowed to take their

solos. Check them out! These players are some of the greats but the jams do not turn in cosmic Superhero battles with rivals throwing thunderbolts of pentatonic licks and chromatic runs at each other! It's a not a battle. There is an element of competition, yes but it's more a matter of 'what do you think of that, then buddy?' than 'I WANT TO STAMP ON YOUR GRAVE AND KILL YOUR PUPPY!! GRRRR!!!!'

The main problem, of course, is that most people are so intent on 'doing their own thing' they don't bother to listen to the other members of the band. Let me give you an example. I'm at a jam session and I get put together with four other musicians – a selection which frankly did not bode well from the outset - a left-handed drummer playing a right-handed kit, another drummer who is actually playing bass (or at least holding it and striking the strings in a semi-convincing manner) and a harmonica player who appeared to have had his instrument surgically implanted in a manner that he could not even breathe without making some noise. There was also another guitar player with no outstanding and, certainly, no redeeming, features. So with heart in mouth, I launched into a mid-tempo shuffle in A and they sort of joined in or at least ambled alongside me, heading vaguely in the same direction.

I attempted to pass around the solos in my usual democratic manner but to no avail. It's difficult to communicate with musicians who don't make any eye contact. After a couple of choruses, to be frank, I was bored and tried to get everybody to acknowledge and react to do a final turnaround. In my dreams. After three failed attempts with hand waving, head nodding and even walking up to the other participants, I took drastic action and approaching the critical point in the chorus, I screamed: 'Alright!' This got the desired result in the sense that it ended the song but not as I'd planned with the classic repeated turnaround. Fat chance. When they heard me scream, they looked up like so many startled rabbits and simply stopped – no fumbling, no hesitation just a dead stop as if I unplugged them all simultaneously. Not ideal or classy but at least the agony was over. In fairness, the organiser who has since become a good friend was mortified and put me on again with some other guys which was much more fun but I can still see that guitar player grinning and duck walking constantly not only in the slow blues, but in between numbers.

Of course, one of the disadvantages of jam sessions is that they take place in licensed premises, and many musicians do not perform their best under the 'affluence of incohol'. Of course, if the audience is also inebriated as well this can encourage the performers to take risks and do the unexpected. However this can often backfire, with drummers falling off their stools and guitarists inadvertently launching their guitars into space . . . so many examples on YouTube, too humorous to mention!

But then sometimes a jam can be spectacular. A few years ago I went to one in Nashville where they put me together with another guitarist, a keyboard player, a bass player and a drummer. We got on stage, I said 'Black Cat Bone? funky in C?' They nodded enthusiastically, I led off with the riff and the band joined me four bars in – no noodling or faffing – straight in and they were rock solid. I handed the first solo to the young guitar player who was red-hot and played a neat melodic solo which resolved superbly - in fact, so well that he needed encouragement to take a second chorus which he kicked in with Wah pedal - cracking stuff.

Keyboards man produced a classic Hammond Solo before I surprised the bass player by passing the solo to him, as well. Then me, the guitarist and keys man traded fours before going back to the head, repeating the turn round and ending with a flourish. We got in, we did the job, we came out. Oh, that all jams

were that much fun!

So I suppose that is my message; if you're going to jam, don't just play a wall of notes – remember to take your fingers off the strings or the keys, and take that thing out of your mouth, whether its small and silvery or big, and brassy, at least occasionally – and just listen to what is going on. And by the way, do remember that nobody in the audience is going to say 'I want to book you to support Joe/Cory/Yola (delete as appropriate) on their next European tour. Just enjoy playing with the other musicians not against them. Okay! one more time - one - two - one - two - three - four...

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VIRTUAL BLUES

by *Adam Kennedy*

Presented here in the latest instalment of Virtual Blues are some of the blues artists that have caught our attention around the world during recent weeks and months.

GRETA VALENTI

(Orange County, CA)

US-based blues outfit Beaux Gris Gris and the Apocalypse is the musical creation of Greta Valenti and Robin Davey. The group recently unveiled their excellent new single, "Fill Me Up". The song is the band's first release from their forthcoming album 'Good Times End Times'. Subsequently, the pair also has their own production company/creative agency namely Grow Vision. One of their recent projects includes a documentary regarding blues legend Larry McCray. The band will be touring the UK in support of their forthcoming album. For tickets and further details, please visit beauxgrisgris.com

TERESA JAMES

(Los Angeles, CA)

Last year Teresa James and the Rhythm Tramps unveiled their incredible new album Rose-Colored Glasses Vol 1. Of course, you would expect nothing less than quality from an artist whose previous studio album "Here In Babylon" gained a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Blues Album. James is joined by her partner Terry Wilson, who played alongside Free legend Paul Kossoff in the band Backstreet Crawler. For their latest offering, James called in a whole raft of musical guests including Texas guitar greats such as Anson Funderburgh, Johnny Lee Schell, Lee Roy Parnell, Yates McKendree and Snuffy Walden, to name but a few.

TIFFANY POLLACK

(New Orleans, Louisiana)

Last year New Orleans based blues artist Tiffany Pollack released her new album “Bayou Liberty”. The album was produced by Blues Music Award winner John Nemeth, who also appears on the release. As an adopted child, Pollack dedicated the album to her Uncle Charles, who had found her and reconnected the artist with her birth family. Sadly, he passed away at the age of 70 in February 2021. In recent times, Pollack has been performing in and around the magical and somewhat musical city of New Orleans, with the occasional live streaming concert to boot. The artist’s latest offering brings together the very best of southern music and New Orleans charm.

GABRIELLA JONES

(Birmingham, UK)

British singer, songwriter and guitarist Gabriella Jones spent the final days of 2021 in the studio putting the finishing touches to her brand-new album, with a release date yet to be confirmed. The artist recently made her live return supporting US blues/rocker Mike Zito at the 100 Club in London. And whilst her fans await the release of Jones' new album, you can catch up with Gabriella on her all-new radio show on Brum Radio every Thursday between 3-5 pm.

KILLING ME SOFTLY

by **Paul Davies** Images: **Supplied**

Music soundtrack and film fit together like a dovetail joint - the one supports the other seamlessly and becomes symbiotic - where one succeeds the other tends to follow.

This tried and tested formula is firmly embedded in the fabric of modern culture. However, Guy Hale, along with Mike Zito, has created a novel twist on this method by writing a modern music murder mystery cum ghost story with an accompanying album where Zito assumes the persona of the book's protagonist, Jimmy Wayne, on twelve outstanding Americana Blues tracks. Zito's vintage voice deeply interprets Hale's filmic song narratives as this tight tongue and groove-fit partnership intuitively pair together very well.

'The Comeback Trail: Killing Me Softly' is a novel/ soundtrack documenting a downbeat anti-hero's tale of dubious salvation via killer songs in a page-turning plot as venomous as a rattlesnake's sting. Furthermore, the album

soundtrack sings with the verbal pictures that Hale paints for Mike Zito to remarkably render with his world-weary St Louis drawl. Taking a leaf straight out of the Elmore Leonard and Kinky Friedman genre of books, Killing Me Softly documents the fall and supernatural rise of main character Jimmy Wayne from third rate Nevada cabaret obscurity to notoriety gained from a spooky ability to write great songs from his nefarious murderous deeds as Hale recalls the origins of his forthcoming trilogy of books:

"It's a bit different because I'm a record producer and songwriter as well and Mike Zito is probably my best friend. We were talking about this two years ago in LA when Mike said, 'I had a dream one night about a guy who accidentally killed his girlfriend and then woke up and there was a song and he suddenly realised he could write a great song when he killed somebody'."

From this inspired late-night chat Guy further reveals the genesis of The Comeback Trail idea: "So, I said that I'll pick it up and run with it but I'll write the songs and you record them and that's how it happened," he says,

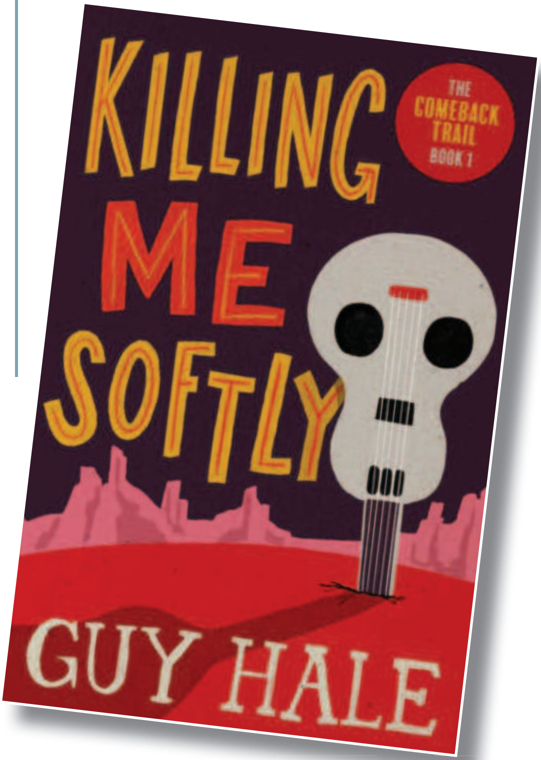
"Now it's spun off and I've got a book deal for a trilogy and I've just finished the second novel for which we're making the second album. That'll be out in November and the third one's going to be out in April next year."

Releasing this creative genie out of an after-dark liqueur bottle has produced a whole new inspirational direction for Hale and Zito, as Guy enthuses: "The music is an Americana Blues tale: it's quite dark! But we're going to lighten it up a little bit on the second one. I've already got Barnes and Noble in the States taking it and it's going on digital platforms, so it'll get worldwide distribution that way. It's also going to be in Waterstones and WH Smith and all major independent bookshops in the UK."

And the music? "It's going to be good for Blues music because anybody who buys the book also gets a free download, via a QR code, which takes them to the website where you can download the soundtrack and it's the same with the soundtrack that fans buy or download where they get the book for free; they're both linked," confirms Hale.

The Killing Me Softly album soundtrack is a top-notch standalone recording in itself where the astute lyrics visualise hard-boiled observations of a dead-beat existence with a breaking bad alienation from reality that Zito imperiously translates with no little aplomb. There is a very fine balance of slow-paced ruminations in these grooves such as album opener Vacant Stare and Lonely Old Lady contrasting with the raucous To Your Scattered Bodies Go, Rage and, adding infamy to a famous song title, Stairway To Hell.

The album and book combine like a chaser's fiery blast follows an ice-cold beer to produce a



satisfying heady cocktail of music and word about which Hale heartily agrees as he details the plot: “The book is about a down on his luck Blues-Americana singer who is doing the cabaret at a third-rate casino in Nevada. One night, he accidentally strangles his girlfriend during some drunken autoerotic sex and, when he wakes up the next morning, he finds her hanging from the wardrobe. Next to his bed he also finds, in his handwriting, the best song that he has ever written. Wendy, his dead girlfriend, is also there haunting him and is surprisingly positive about being dead. It’s never clearly explained in the story if she really is a ghost or if he is imagining her. She convinces him to bury her at a secret place they used to go to in a nearby canyon.”

Guy takes up the pace of this deadly narrative: “He starts performing the new song with his band and the punters stop gambling and really start to listen. A few weeks later, two thugs working for a Vegas mobster called Jack Lantern come after Jimmy Wayne. Jimmy somehow manages to escape and run them down with their own truck in the old quarry they had taken him to kill him. He buries their bodies with Wendy’s and then finds two more great songs the next morning on his bedside table. Now he knows that when he kills people it unlocks an ability to write a great song. He starts performing all the new songs and the crowds go wild for them. The manager of the Casino, who has a soft spot for Jimmy, calls a friend who has a label in LA to come and listen to him. He does and agrees that he has something special going on”

“He offers him a deal on the spot and tells him he has a spot in the studio in eight weeks’ time. He also tells Jimmy he’s going to need another eight songs! Jimmy is a nice guy, but a record deal is a record deal. So, he decides he will only kill scumbags. It’s a dark comedy crime thriller. I wrote all the songs as the murders occurred and got Mike Zito to record them as Jimmy Wayne and Kid Andersen to mix and master them at Greaseland Studios. Kid also added some instrumentation and vocals and got his wife, the very talented Lisa Leuschner Andersen, to do some vocals and a duet with Mike.”

No wonder there is already some interest from film production studios to maybe bring this to a large or small screen audience!

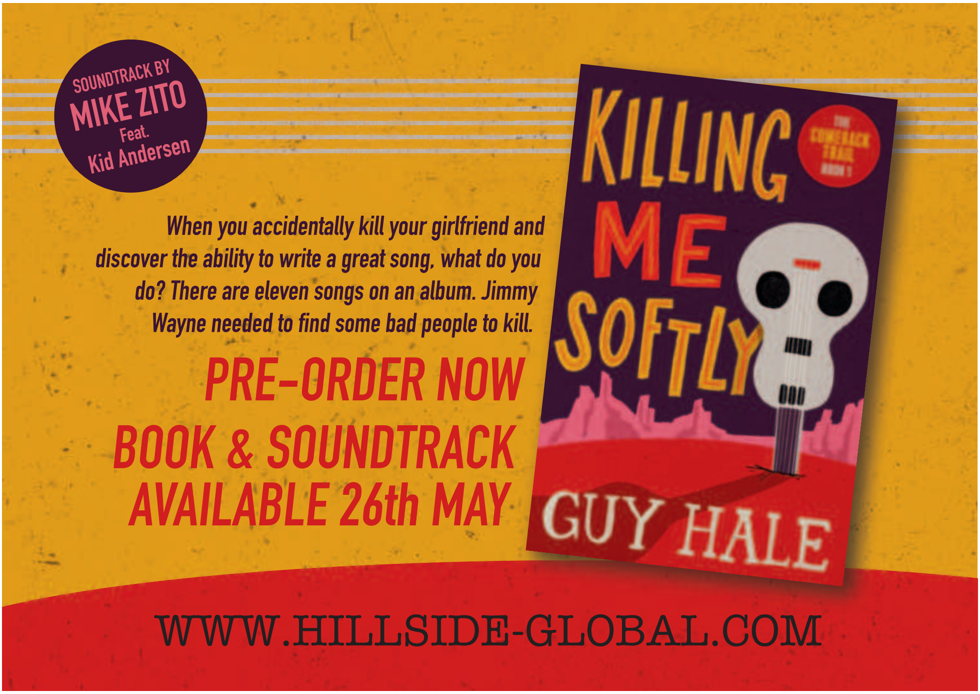
Talking of music, Guy is also something of a blues connoisseur. After selling his very successful construction business he poured his emotional focus and talents into setting up a record label, Hillside Global outside the USA plus Gulf Coast Records in the States, on which he has an impressive roster of Blues artists.

His own love of the Blues began when one of his schoolteacher's decided to sell their album collection and Guy snapped up John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers A Hard Road, Crusade, Blues From Laurel Canyon and 'Beano' albums. Muddy Water's Hard Again release, produced by Johnny Winter, also made a deep impression on Hale from which he investigated all the Clapton, Green, Taylor, Beck and Johnny Winter discographies.

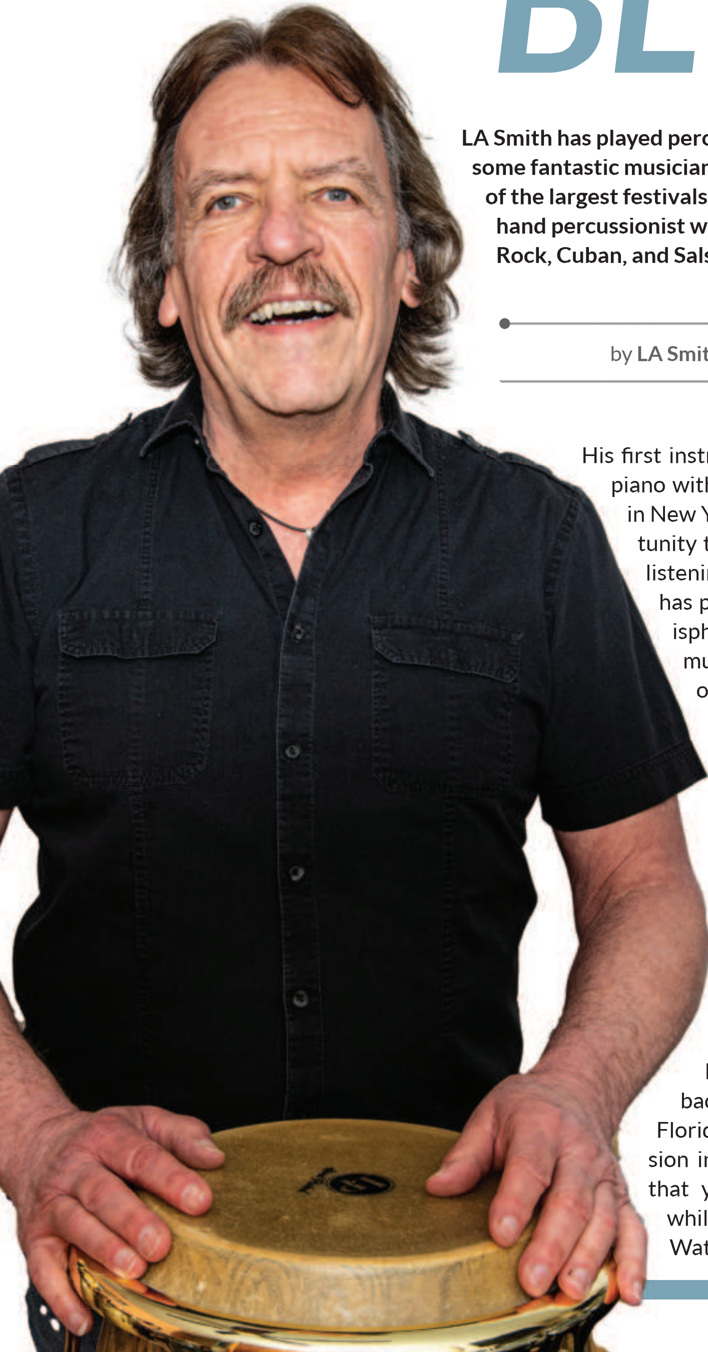
But it was meeting up with Mike Zito, who encouraged Guy to set up his record labels, that caused this later in life transformation into a putative music-mogul as Hale jovially recalls: "I first met Mike when he toured the UK with The Royal Southern Brotherhood and we became friends and he used to come back to my house; it just built up from there."

Then came the nitty-gritty of starting the label, as Guy recalls: "The second that I announced that I had time on my hands, which I never had as I used to work all over the world, Mike said, 'Right, let's start a label,' and when you love the blues and someone like Mike will come on board I said, 'Let's do it' and here we are." And Guy Hale is in exactly the right time and place for a music themed trilogy of murder mystery books and accompanying albums that celebrate the Blues with an Americana twist.

Yet, it's Mike Zito's gravitas as a musician whose voice has a dash of Johnny Cash and Chris Rea to its timbre that draws the listener in to these consummately crafted, constructed, and played songs which, with Guy Hale's supernatural songwriting par excellence, is a masterpiece. Judging by the deadly engaging plot to the Killing Me Softly book and the further serial releases already in the pipeline, which is a ready-made TV series just waiting to be snapped up, Guy Hale is going be a seriously in demand big personality for a very long time to come.



PERCUSSION IN THE BLUES



LA Smith has played percussion all over the world, with some fantastic musicians. From small venues to some of the largest festivals. LA Smith is a Conga player, hand percussionist with experience in Blues, Pop, Rock, Cuban, and Salsa music.

by **LA Smith** Images: **Supplied**

His first instrument was the accordion, then piano with recitals until he was 12. Living in New York brought LA plenty of opportunity to play in Greenwich Village and listening to the Blues first-hand. LA has played all over the western hemisphere with great musicians, as LA's music network grew, he was invited on stage with some of the Blues Music world's biggest headliners including Tommy Castro, Lightnin Malcolm, Tab Benoit, Grady Champion, Michael Burks, Big Head Todd, Calexico, Randy Oxford Band, Mike Zito, Chubby Carrier, Cedric Burnside, Coco Montoya, Jules Broussard to name a few. LA has found one thing the same. Percussion is no longer what it once was.

It was 2012 when LA was getting backline for Resurrection Drums in Florida, he first realized the percussion inventory was getting low. Later that year, he found the same thing while getting backline for Safeway Waterfront Blues Festival, Portland

OR, and the San Diego Blues Festival, CA. The drum stores that would have over half their inventory, filled with congas, bongos, jambes and all kinds of hand percussion instruments were down to ten to fifteen percent of what they were.

Talking to the drum stores owners, LA was told the same thing. Since the recession of 1980's to the recession in 2007, percussionists were being dropped from touring, because they could not afford to be added to the band. The amount of music being recorded with percussion was falling.

The lack of instruments and the rising cost of the instruments was a big factor. The lack of percussionists being able to play Blues and pass on what they do was huge. Where could a person go to find out how to play a conga, jambe or even bongos? There is always the internet, but it is not the same as hands on with a percussionist. And there was nothing on the internet about playing percussion in blues.

Buying congas, or jambe and start playing, discovering sounds by trial and error, was how most approached learning the sounds of percussion. And with less hand percussion at festivals, the enthusiasm to learn was on the back burner for many. The excitement and experience to play the 'ear-candy' that congas, bongos and jenbes provide, was only a dream for most.

For generations music of all kinds, including Blues, was adding the percussion that made people dance, enjoying the rhythms that created the backbeat; it was starting to be missed. The percussion was still out there from years gone by, and yet percussion in Blues was also missing congas, the very quiet backbeat on a guitar solo, the shaker, or even tasteful tambourine.

How would an enthusiastic musician learn how to play a conga and how to be able to read the percussion music? And how would a young percussionist figure out the subtleness of percussion in Blues. It's on most Blues CD's now, but back in the beginning it was hard to find.

Blues and percussion is being in another zone, letting everything you know flow as true 'ear candy.' Subtle as a percussionist can be, and yet out front when the music gets low, and the vocals

ring. Can't go to hard, or to fast with Blues, there is always a flow, and the percussionist must be patient, willing to play with his ears. From start to finish on blues songs there is a time to play and a time to stay when playing Blues percussion.

By the late-90s, It was getting harder and harder to find. As a result, the demand for hand percussion was down, and inventory went down. By the time the pandemic hit in 2020 /21, supply of congas, bongos and jambes came almost to a complete halt. This year, 2022, a set of congas, bongos, jambes, are all on an- order base. Drums stores are told it needs a four to eight months lead-time to get instruments.

The demand was down, the percussion on albums was less, and the world was not getting to hear as much percussion. A huge challenge after thirty years of decline, lack of demand to add percussion to touring groups, due to overall cost of touring, led to less percussionists being seen at festivals, and large venues. Only the biggest touring groups could afford to add the percussionist to their tour. This also led to less percussion on albums, and now CD's, so most groups wanting percussion would settle for a tambourine, or shaker on the side. In turn, this led to a lack of musicians passing Blues percussion on. Less percussionists touring, and less teaching hand percussion.

Blues percussion was never totally eliminated from albums and CD's but only the big groups would have percussion on their CD's. Some would only put one song with percussion because they did not have a percussionist on tour with them.

It was not all doom and gloom for percussion. Local bands were still having good local percussionists play in local Blues events. But most were limited to bars and small outdoor gatherings. This was the bright side. Most musicians in Blues, Rock, Country, Americana etc.,- music that came from the Blues - all loved percussion and wanted it. Percussion was still alive and loved across all genres.

There was the challenge for LA Smith. To come up with a way to bring hand percussion back into Blues music. First there had to be need, that was obvious to LA. Music, and percussion go back to the beginning, over thousands of years.

A percussion instrument can be any object which produces a sound by being struck, shaken, rubbed, and scraped with an implement, or by any other action which sets the object into vibration. The term usually applies to an object used in a rhythmic context with musical intent.

Anthropologists and historians often explain that percussion instruments were the first musical devices ever created. The first musical

instrument used by humans was the voice, but percussion instruments such as hands and feet, then sticks, rocks, and logs were the next steps in the evolution of music.

The first music played was not a string instrument or hollow tree, or a surface that would resonate a sound. It was the human voice, followed by percussion, sticks on wooden trees or blocks, rocks hitting wood making a rhythmic sound. The first type of percussion instrument was simply anything hit together to produce sound. Drums evolved from this and are known to have existed from around 6000 BC. They were used by all major civilizations throughout the world. Within 500 years the first drum was found in China, alligator skin was being pulled over hollow wood trees. The drum was born.

LA had an idea to promote percussion in Blues, and it was not to make money and sell more congas. No, it was to make more music, and stimulate more percussion in music. The best way to promote percussion is first get out there and play. That is done by playing at large festivals where your audience frequently cover all ages.

With LA playing festivals with big headliners, his exposure to percussion was good. LA played in festivals with headliners and then did the second thing needed, live music. Get the experience into the hands of anyone that wanted to try playing a hand drum.

In 2014, LA began to play blues festivals, then put on workshops, from Boquete Jazz and Blues Festival in Panama, Baja Blues Festival in Mexico, Festival International De Tremblant, Canada, and to Blues festivals all over the United States. LA Takes twelve sets of bongos to Blues festivals, donated by sponsors, and in turn donates to the schools in the area.

LA would come in and play with headliners, putting on forty-five minute workshops (often multiple workshops). Sometimes to all ages, sometimes for kids only. Either way LA passes

on Passport Rhythms, these are basic rhythms found in over a hundred rhythms in all genres. This way everyone can experience rhythms they are learning, that are in their favorite music. Doing this at Blues festivals gets the music out and gets the everyone to hear percussion in Blues. And that's what it's all about, Percussion in Blues! Maybe it's about time for percussion workshops in Europe.

36th LEGENDARY RHYTHM & BLUES CRUISE

Images and text: **Laura Carbone**

Twice a year, the blues heads south for a Caribbean vacation aboard the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise (LRBC).

Over thirty Blues, RnB, rock, soul and funk bands board the boat making it the largest floating blues festival at sea. This February it celebrated its 36th sailing on one of Holland Americas largest flagships, the Rotterdam, with 5 stages and lots of room to stretch out and dance. The musician list is long and impressive. Topping this is multi Grammy Award-winner Taj Mahal, crowned as the King of this cruise and is present on each sailing. It is a real treat to see Taj doing his Caribbean-based songs with the Island breezes blowing.

Tommy Castro's popularity has made him a regular on every cruise and he kicks off the traditional opening night jam. Chicago was represented by Ronnie Baker Brooks, Mud Morganfield and Toronzo Cannon, and Mississippi by none other than Christone "Kingfish" Ingram and Mr. Sipp. There are legends like Irma Thomas, fresh newcomers such as Gabe Stillman, rockers like Joanne Shaw Taylor and fan favorites such as John Nemeth and the Blue Dreamers. Big bands like Dumpstafunk and Victor Wainwright and the Train got to stretch out and get funky. Mutiple parties happen with virgin cruisers getting musical cherries popped and returnee parties of cruisers greeting each other like a long-lost beloved family.

Theme nights include Give me Back My Wig, Pirates of The Caribbean and Mardi Gras where the fans get into the spotlight with parades and competitions. Late night jams happen with a mix of artists jumping on stage together, multi- guitar mashups, mind blowing horn jams and legendary vocal duels until 3 AM. Then in the wee hours people slip into Chuk Barbers Soul Lounge where the musicians hang and jazz fuses with RnB while the sun rises. Other activities included silent auctions of vintage instruments and collectible memorabilia, pro and amateur jams, music industry lectures and an artist autograph/ meet-and-greet session. The LRBC cruise includes all the luxuries of cruising, with specialty restaurants, spa, casino, shopping and pampering service. No wonder why people return every year, selling it out in advance.

LEFT PAGE:
- John Nemeth

TOP LEFT:
- Room ful of Blues
- Mr. Sipp
- Albert Castiglia
- Ronnie Baker Brooks

TOP ROW:
- Deanna Bogart
- Irma Thomas
- Kingfish

BOTTOM ROW:
- Joanne Shaw Taylor
- Victor Wainwright
- Kevin Burt

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• Tommy Castro

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— As Seen & Heard on —
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DUSK BROTHERS

www.duskbrothers.com

Dusk Brothers are a foot-stomping dark swamp blues duo from the UK. The two siblings (yes, they really are brothers) cut their teeth in rock bands. They were once a key creative force in

a four-piece called Halo which was signed by a major record label back in 1999. The band toured extensively and honed their craft on the road.

Fast forward to 2015, a year when the Moncrieff brothers found themselves between musical projects. Coincidentally they happened upon the cigar box guitar movement that had been steadily gathering momentum, particularly in the US and the UK. People were utilising cigar boxes and other unusual objects to craft their unique instruments. The brothers owned some suitable tools and figured they'd have a go at building their own instruments using spare wood they had lying around. They built a couple of makeshift guitars, strung them up, plugged them in and their musical world was instantly turned on its head.

These were three and four-stringed instruments that they didn't yet know how to play. The familiar rules and sounds were abandoned and there were no intentions or expectations for the music they were now making. It was liberating. The raw, bluesy sounds coming from those new instruments were intoxicating and a torrent of songs began to pour out in a remarkably different style to anything they'd done before. They continued to build and with foot drums and cymbals now in the mix their distinctive sound was taking shape. An addiction to creating unusual instruments was also burgeoning.

The brothers have since amassed a van-full of custom-built items including foot drums made from ripped-down 55-gallon oil drums and arrays of foot-operated cymbals, percussion, and custom guitar amps, all played by the two, each of them a one-man-band both playing in unison to create a depth of sound you would never expect from a duo.

With their debut EP, "Storms, Rum, Liars and Guns", under their belts the brothers took to live streaming during the 2020 lockdown, converting the leaky garage they used for rehearsing into their own pallet-wood-clad streaming and recording studio complete with its own ramshackle rum bar. They have streamed over 50 shows to date and have recently begun recording their first full Dusk Brothers album in their "Rum Shack" studio in Bristol.

You can currently download two free tracks from Dusk Brothers' "Storms, Rum, Liars & Guns" EP at duskbrothers.com.

SUNNY BLEAU

sunnybleau.com

On their debut album, Breakfast Served Cold, Sunny Bleau & The Moons paint a landscape that uses every hue in the blues palette. While there might be flirtations with shades of jazz, soul, pop and country sprinkled across the canvas, the primary color is most definitely blue.

Over the course of 11 songs, Bleau's vocals strike an ideal balance of precision, power and raw emotion to deliver a memorable sonic picture. The Moons (Nic Cocco, guitars, keyboards; Paul Kastick, drums / percussion; Alex Karasinski, bass) flex their own musical muscles as well, seamlessly shifting from badass blues to slinky and seductive grooves and back again with a deftness and versatility that belie the fact this is their first release. "A few years ago I was singing with Nic and Alex, who ended up being the core of The Moons," Bleau relates.

"We were doing a lot of jazz and standards and, at a certain point, everyone kept saying 'hey, you can sing blues too.' It was one of those lightbulb moments. We started going deep into the blues and everything just clicked! I've never considered myself a vocalist, I'm a storyteller. The songs on this record go in the direction the lyrics take them. I'm telling stories, presenting the truth; sometimes its fun and flirtatious, sometimes its deep." Bleau taps into universal themes of love, lust, loss and redemption, but her lyrics resonate on a deeper level. "Everybody gets the blues, everyone can relate to it. It doesn't matter where you are in life, rich, poor, whatever; everyone gets it.

I try to give voice to all those secrets we hold inside as women. I want everybody who sees us, everyone who hears these songs, to connect with them in a way that makes them feel their secrets are safe with me." Sunny Bleau might be serving her breakfast cold, but she delivers ample heat while The Moons keep things simmering on the back burner. Brownie McGhee said "Blues is truth," and Sunny Bleau & The Moons don't lie.

JON SLIDEWELL

thereedcutters.co.uk

From the ashes of good time R&B band JP and the Razors comes the bar room swaggering old skool R&B and blues of Jon Slidewell and the Reedcutters.

Between 2017-19 as JP and the Razors they firstly released a 7 song mini LP called 'Let the good times roll' that featured seven classic Blues and R&B covers by the likes of Willie Dixon, Elmore James, Muddy Waters and Bo Diddley – This release brought much positive attention from magazines like Blues Matters, Blues Blast and Rock n Reel.

Then in mid 2019 they released an EP called 'Four songs from the house'. All four songs were self penned by Jonny and featured the lead guitar talents of the then 16 year old Jake Poole. This release further raised the bands profile and they were subsequently featured on a Rock n Reel compilation CD. But then the combination of a rushed failed – never to be commercially released LP, then the sad tragic death of the bands original drummer – Ross 'Razor' Crichton (RIP 24/12/19 – shine on soul brother x). Jake going off to university and of course the 'Pandemic' – all left the band in a state of limbo...

But vocalist/guitarist Jonny never stopped writing Blues related songs – and as a tribute to his old Drummer Jonny compiled and released a demo of 14 self penned songs under the bands old name - simply 'the Razors'. This CD was meant to be a purely 'one off' demo release for folk who knew or had met Ross.

But Blues Matters journalists – Stephen Harrison and John Mitchell picked up on it, and it received an unexpected great review in Blues Matters. This in turn spurred the band to get back together!

Lead guitarist Jake agreed to help out when he could and the band invited old guitarist DB Williams back into the fold. Throughout late 2020 and well into 2021 Jonny ducked and dived in and out of the studio when possible, plus making full use of his old Tascam 4 track to record tracks 'Low Fi'.

In the late summer of 2021 the band played two sets at the Stockport Blues festival and went down a storm! After this Jonny and studio engineer Leigh Eaton worked hard putting songs together and along with the Tascam Porta studio recordings there is now enough material for a full band LP. It will be called 'One more for the Road' and will feature 13 songs written by Jonny and one cover by Willie Dixon.

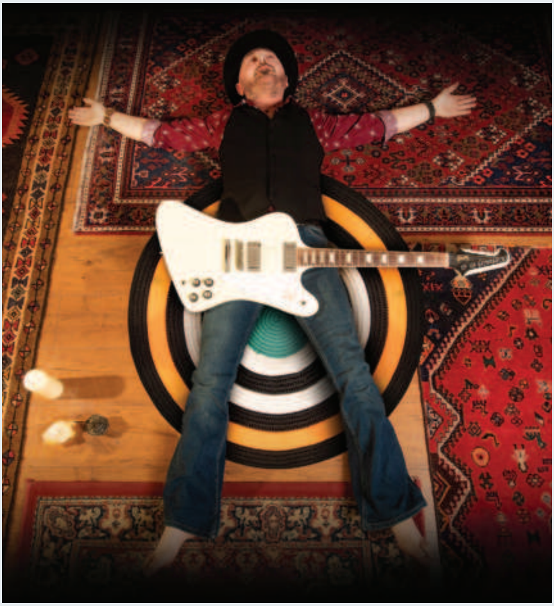
They wear their influences on their hearts – The deep south of Son House, the cool blues of BB King, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf - The gritty slide of Elmore James and the good time R&B fun and menace of John Lee Hooker, Hound Dog Taylor and George Thorogood. Also not forgetting Lightin' Hopkins, Buddy Guy, Rory Gallagher, Junior Kimborough and the Black Keys.

Jon Slidewell and the Reedcutters are:
Jonny Slidewell: Vocal, Guitars, Harmonica
Dave Roberts: Bass
Jake Poole: Lead guitar
S.A. Wright: Drums
DB Williams: Guitars & Slide

Watch out for the LP in 2020
The band are up for playing anytime, any place, any where.

MATT PEARCE & THE MUTINY

mattpearceandthemutiny.com



The rebellion continues, con gusto! Matt Pearce & The Mutiny are gearing up to release their eagerly awaited second album, under the tasty moniker of 'The Soul Food Store'. The album brims with funky musical goodness: the kind of sound that Matt adores and wanted to create when he first set out on his musical mutiny, and is released everywhere on 29st April. The album was preceded by the single 'Got A Thing Going On', a raunchy Stones-esque horn-driven song, out appropriately on Valentine's Day.

Matt & The Mutiny's debut album 'Gotta Get Home' and single 'Set Me Free' both went to #1 in the Blues charts, and the song has clocked up 130,000 streams on Spotify, "I was totally thrilled how much this very personal song connected with so many people" added Matt.

Like its predecessor, 'The Soul Food Store' is self-produced and features Matt as vocalist, guitarist, and songwriter, aided and abetted by the crème de la crème of the London blues scene. Matt explained the original drive behind his solo project by saying "I wanted to combine the sounds that I love: rocking blues and funky, soulful grooves." With this second album, he still ardently pursues that goal, but this time around there's more too.

"So... what is The Soul Food Store? A place, a state of mind, a feeling? When the song came along, mid-lockdown, it seemed to tie together all the songs I'd been working on, it became a focus. "I wanted my album to be what my favourite music is to me: somewhere to go to be happy, laugh, sing, dance, forget all my troubles, or be comforted despite them. "If 'Gotta Get Home' was a statement of intent, then this album is about me being at home, with all the music I love. So, as well as the funk and the rockin' blues, there's some soul, and ballads, and psychedelic, and maybe even a wee disco vibe creepin' in... All the sounds that put a smile on my face.

"So the whole point of this album is to combat the negativity that's so easy to give in to these days, and like the old song, accentuate the positive! But always with a groove... As the last song on the album says, 'Everybody should be king of their world every day...'
"The Soul Food Store is now opening: You coming in..?"

MR TCHANG BLUZ EXPLOSION

bluztrack-productions.com/mr-tchang

Sam Mister Tchang is a true French Blues guitar wizard. Based in Cognac, home of one of the country's most important international blues festivals, Cognac Blues Passions, he embodies the very spirit of the blues. For many years, he has been the driving force behind Les Bluz Explosion together with a few buddies, comprising a band that is a firm favourite on the national blues stage. The Bluz Explosion often works as a touring outfit, supporting visiting US blues musicians in Europe.

Formed in 2011 as a duo, the group quickly transformed into a quartet. The group knew how to impose this authentic feeling, filled with energy, with the sincerity of a fiery Blues and assert themselves as major artists of the European blues scene! The sound and style of the Combo are radically in the vein of a West-Side Blues, largely fed by the Bands of Magic Sam, Earl Hooker, Otis Rush... or even Buddy Guy, Jimmy Dawkins... The personality of Bluz Explosion is expressed above all through their compositions, resolutely anchored in these styles which can be rough, often explosive, sometimes sensual and tense, always interpreted with passion and fervour. Artists used to concerts cafés, clubs and Blues, Jazz and other festivals, including outside the borders during tours in Luxembourg, Belgium, England, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia , Hungary as well as in the United States and South America.

Bluz Explosion has shared the stage with artists such as: Canned Heat, Phil Guy, Mighty Sam Mc Clain, Tito and Tarantula, Lynwood Slim, Shawn Pittman, Tee (Marc.T), Franck Goldwasser (Paris Slim), Roscoe Chenier, Memo Gonzalez & the Bluescasters, UP Wilson, Dave Riley, Johny Sansone, Duke Robillard, Leon Blue, Sonny Rhodes, RJ Mischo Big George Brock, Doug Jay, Gene Taylor, Super Chikan etc.

At the core, Mister Tchang's guitar skills are simply fabulous. This is a guy who can play with passion, purpose and crank up the power to overdrive whenever needed. His soaring, searing solos often form the basic framework behind many of these overseas visitors and help ensure packed houses whenever they play.

There can be no doubt Sam Mister Tchang is one of France's greatest guitarists and a man who simply lives and breathes blues music. After around thirty years as a player, he is a vital force in his homeland with an ever-eager hunger to push the musical boundaries and an explosive blues spirit that always drives his personal curiosity.

His soulful voice, his explosive playing, his unique presence make him a major artist on the European blues scene, recognized by all of his peers.

THE ILLUSTRATED BLUES OF BRIAN KRAMER

LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS

This is the first of a series in Blues Matters where I will present one of my Blues illustrations along with a brief overview of select iconic musicians as well as personal recollections and influence.

It all starts with Sam "Lightnin" Hopkins for me, one of the most prolific and recorded Texas Bluesmen with somewhere between over eight hundred and a thousand songs under his belt starting in 1946. He still toured and played frequently up until his death, January 30th 1982 at 69 years old.

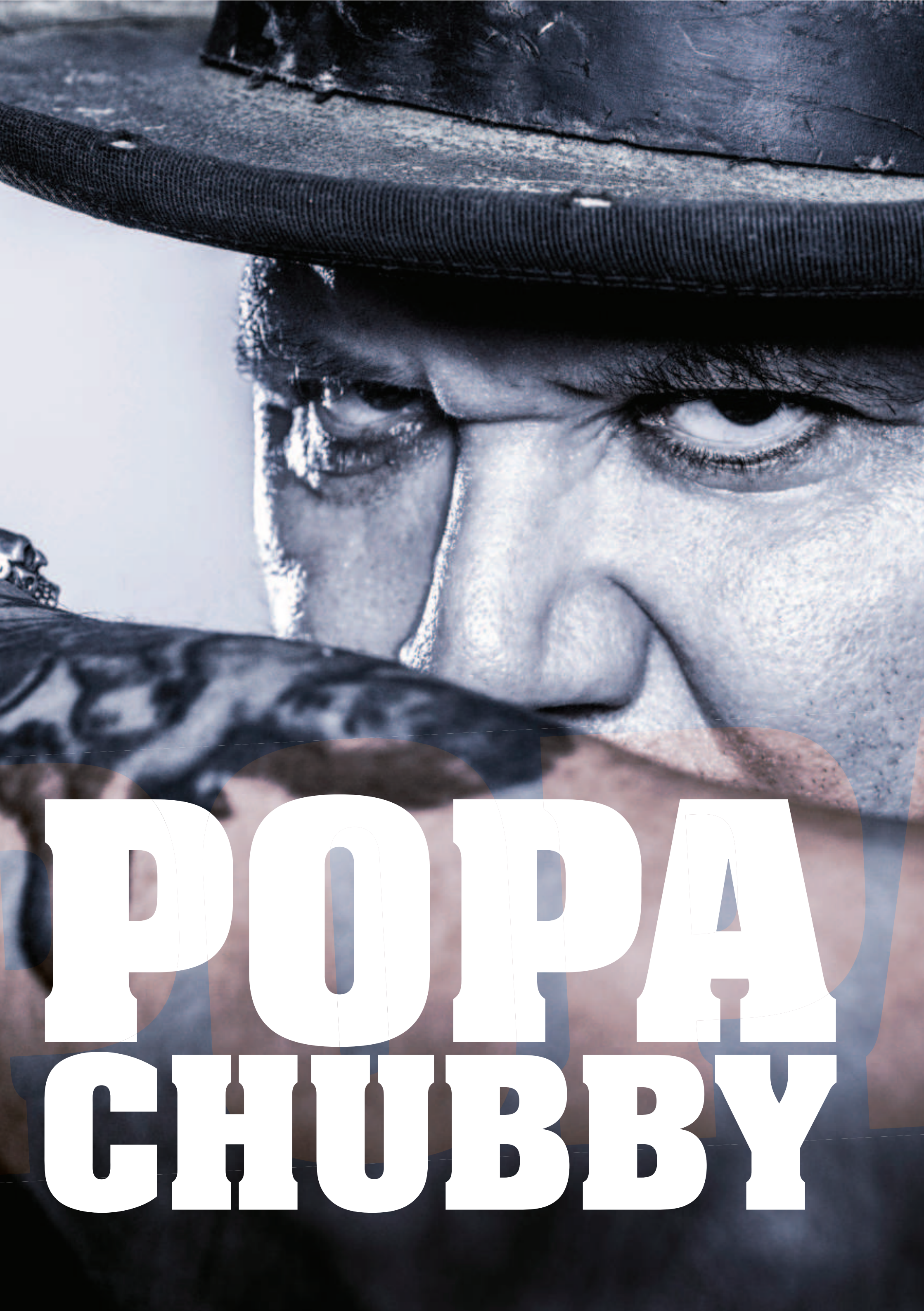
I was in attendance at a New York show in a small dive Blues Bar called Tramps, December 1981 when I was 18 years old and it was a spectacular, life altering occurrence! To witness Lightnin' lead the pick-up band through each song, improvising and telling his stories, hearing the man I'd admired on record now come to life. Speaking of records, my rude awakening to the Blues came one summer day in Brooklyn at around 14 or 15 years old when me and a buddy, just for kicks decided on a dare to lift a few records from a neighborhood record shop. The short story is that I grabbed a handful without paying attention, ran like hell (even though the guy didn't even bother to chase us), and when we got back to my friend's apartment to listen to our spoils, among them were a John Mayall & The Blues Breakers (not interesting). A Country Joe & The Fish (too young for mind expanding aids) and an unknown LP with the profile of an African American man in sunglasses playing an acoustic.

When we dropped the needle on that vinyl, it was indeed like I was struck by Lightnin' and it set in motion everything that I would discover on a lifelong Blues journey.

I don't have to preach to the choir as anyone who reads this magazine knows and reveres the impact and influence of his Blues.
Stand out, signature songs; Katie Mae Blues, Black Cat Blues, Woke Up This Morning, Trouble Blues, and of course the uncompromising Mojo Hand are just a taste of the depth and power of his stories and Blues and Lightnin' was a true storyteller, often making up and improvising new verses and lines on the spot as it suited him.

I have drawn quite a few of Mr. Hopkins, but this is the latest that I am proud of, as it captures him in his flow and joy of abandon in action. After that 1981 show at Tramps, I took the nerve to approach Lightnin' as he was about to leave the venue and thanked him for inspiring me with his music. He put out his huge, leathery hand, shook mine and with a big, gold toothed grin said "Thank you son".

A month later I found out he had passed away and that was to be one of his final live shows.


POPA
CHUBBY

Theodore Joseph Horowitz is not a name that trips easily off the tongue. Neither is 'Ted' Horowitz. But mention the name, Popa Chubby, and everyone in the blues world instantly recognizes who you are referring to. Born in The Bronx in 1960, Popa Chubby started his musical journey playing the drums before graduating to guitar. Like many before him, he was heavily influenced by The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, to name just a couple. I recently spoke to him over the phone as he travelled through Florida to play a couple of gigs, before boarding the Blues Cruise in Miami to team up with Joe Bonamassa and a whole host of fine blues musicians.

by **Stephen Harrison** Images: **Philip Ducap**

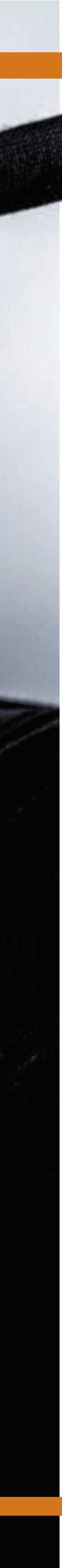
"You really must get over here and get on the Keeping The Blues Alive Cruise, it's a great experience, it sails to Jamacia and back to Miami". Before we got deep into the interview I was intrigued to know exactly where the name Popa Chubby had originated from, I'd read a couple of things but decided to get it straight from the source. "I'm afraid that Popa Chubby is a bit of a naughty name, It was given to me as I was playing at a jam session, and this guy called out, 'Hey Popa Chubby' (loosely this term refers to gaining an erection). I think it's best to leave it at that and move on".

Over the last couple of months here at Blues Matters Towers, we had received three albums that Dixie Frog Records, based in Paris, had released as part of a wider campaign to promote Popa Chubby. The albums were, The Fight Is On, Universal Breakdown Blues, and Back To New York City. "These were re-releases of albums that I had previously recorded in the 90s, Dixie Frog is in the process of releasing the whole catalogue via digital format and also on vinyl, and also my upcoming album, a lot is going on right now, it's a really cool time. I only listen to vinyl at home, but it is still a good thing that the fans can still listen to the albums via a CD. People want to hold onto something physically, nobody wants to get hold of anything on a download".

This is once again proof from a musician that downloads are inferior in sound and quality and will never hold a special place in the hearts of true music lovers, which is something that I, personally, feel very strongly about as blues journalist. There is nothing warm and inviting with a download, it's almost a stain on the music industry - no soul, no feeling. I digress…

We had lots more to talk about rather than the soulless download industry. A vinyl record is real-estate, a piece of real estate, there is a connection straight away, you remember where you got it, what the record meant to you. That finished our rant about the way that sadly some record companies see the future of music and the way we listen to it. During our chat, it was so refreshing to talk about little-known things, things that I had not jotted down to put into a conversation that became a source of mutual mastication for the both of us.

One such revelation regarded the album, 'How'd A White Boy Get The Blues', which I'm lucky enough to have a French import copy of. "It was a video shoot and cover shot that was taken on the New York City Subway, without permission I might add". Small details like this add depth and meaning to a conversation instead of it turning into a Q&A session. "I had an amazing childhood because my parents owned a sweet shop, and in the sweet shop there was a jukebox supply of coins to put into the jukebox, then when the guy came to change the records for the new top ten, I would get to keep the old records and have first opportunity to listen to the new batch of records. At seven years old I had 125 records to my name. I also had a complete knowledge of Motown and Stax music and everything that was being played on



the radio at that time, including Aretha Franklin, The Supremes. In the meantime, my father was a huge jazz fan and he introduced me to all that kind of stuff from a very early age" It was obvious that Popa Chubby was destined to become a musician of some sort given the background that he was growing up in.

As well as listening to the everyday music that was being played on local New York radio, he had started to develop an ear for jazz, which in turn led him into the world of blues. This is not an uncommon turn of events, especially in such a rich diversity of what New York had to offer. "The Rolling Stones, The Who, Led Zeppelin came into my life at an impressionable age, that's when things started to make sense to me. This led to Albert King, Freddie King, and Howlin' Wolf having a huge impact on me. I became a student of blues and will remain a student of blues as long as I'm on this earth (you and me both brother) because there is so much of it that's so rich and beautiful".

As the conversation carried on it became apparent as we are the same age, we'd both found the world of blues music in much the same way. The first Led Zeppelin album, Willie Dixon was all over it, they covered his songs, which led me and Popa down the same path, almost to the point of enlightenment. We both discovered the same things at the same age and were both blown away by what we had heard. It's as if this was meant to be somehow, a calling, an understanding that will remain with the both of us forever.

We had to cut short our conversation as Popa was nearing his destination and needed to prepare for another gig en-route to join the Keeping The Blues Alive Cruise. We reconvened a few days later to continue our chat about how Popa got to where he is at the moment.

"We board the cruise tomorrow, we've been doing some shows on the way down through Florida. We play on the cruise Monday through Thursday, then come back on Friday" We continued chatting about life growing up in The Bronx and what the music scene was like, was there a vibrant blues scene at that time? "Surprisingly, no not at all man, there were no blues clubs around at that time, as I mentioned before, my parents owned a sweet shop which had a jukebox, that was my introduction to music primarily, I grew up on Arthur Avenue which was the area of Dion and The Belmonts, so there was do-wop everywhere, and also Sala music all around us. New York was always a lot of diverse musical influences".

There are musical influences that touch everyone's lives at some point, especially musicians, so after we'd chatted about what and who affected Popa Chubby, I asked him about Sari Schoor, herself a student of Popa Chubby back in the very early days of her career. I've had the pleasure of meeting Sari and interviewing her only last year and am honoured to be a friend of hers. She has told me on several occasions how much Popa Chubby helped her in the early days, and how he encouraged her to pursue a solo career. "Sari is not a protégé of mine, I worked with her briefly back in the day, she is a very talented singer, she gives me a lot of credit but none of it is due (lol). It's very kind of her to say these things about me, but she didn't need my help, she's such a talented artist in her own right. She sang on a record of mine called Universal Breakdown Blues, and then she went solo and is having a really vibrant career of her own".

Over the years Popa Chubby has forged his career into Europe, most notably France, where he is signed to Dixie Frog Records. He's amassed a huge following there and before the pandemic hit, regularly performed all over France at various blues festivals. Did that come as a surprise I wondered? "France has always been very good to me, as has the UK, so I'm anxious to get back over to Europe as quickly as possible, It's been three years since I was over

in the UK and France. The last time I played the UK, I appeared at Edingburgh and at the famous 100 Club in London".

As we had talked extensively about their influences on Popa and his influence upon other artists I was curious to know who had directly influenced him, both musically and career-wise. '' I guess if I had to pick anyone, especially as a songwriter and artist who defined the blues, I would pick Willie Dixon. As a guitarist, I would say, Jimi Hendrix. It's one thing that Willie Dixon said, You don't play anyone else's blues, you play your own blues, and that's what Jimi did. As a songwriter, guitarist, and producer, nobody comes close to Willie Dixon as far as I'm concerned".

We were nearing the end of our conversation, which for me had been such a highlight, it was as if we'd known each other forever, especially with both of us discovering blues music at around the same time and from the same source. Popa explained about was next on his agenda. "We have a few shows in South Florida after the cruise, then we travel to the east coast to do some more shows right around the release of my new record Emotional Gangster in March 2022, then we are coming back over to Europe several times. I've been fortunate enough in my career so far to have had many highlights, especially playing live.

One that sticks out for me, was one of the first times that I played in the UK, I played The Hammersmith Odeon, man that was such a thrill for me, I'll never forget that experience. If I could cover one song by another blues artist, I'd choose Killing Floor by Howlin'Wolf, Hubert Sumlin's guitar on that record is mind-blowing man. I'm going to be playing that song on the cruise alongside Joe Bonamassa, so that's another milestone for me, one which I will never forget. There are a lot of people involved with this cruise that are helping to keep the blues alive, and I'm one of them, that's good enough for me".

popachubby.com

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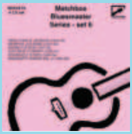

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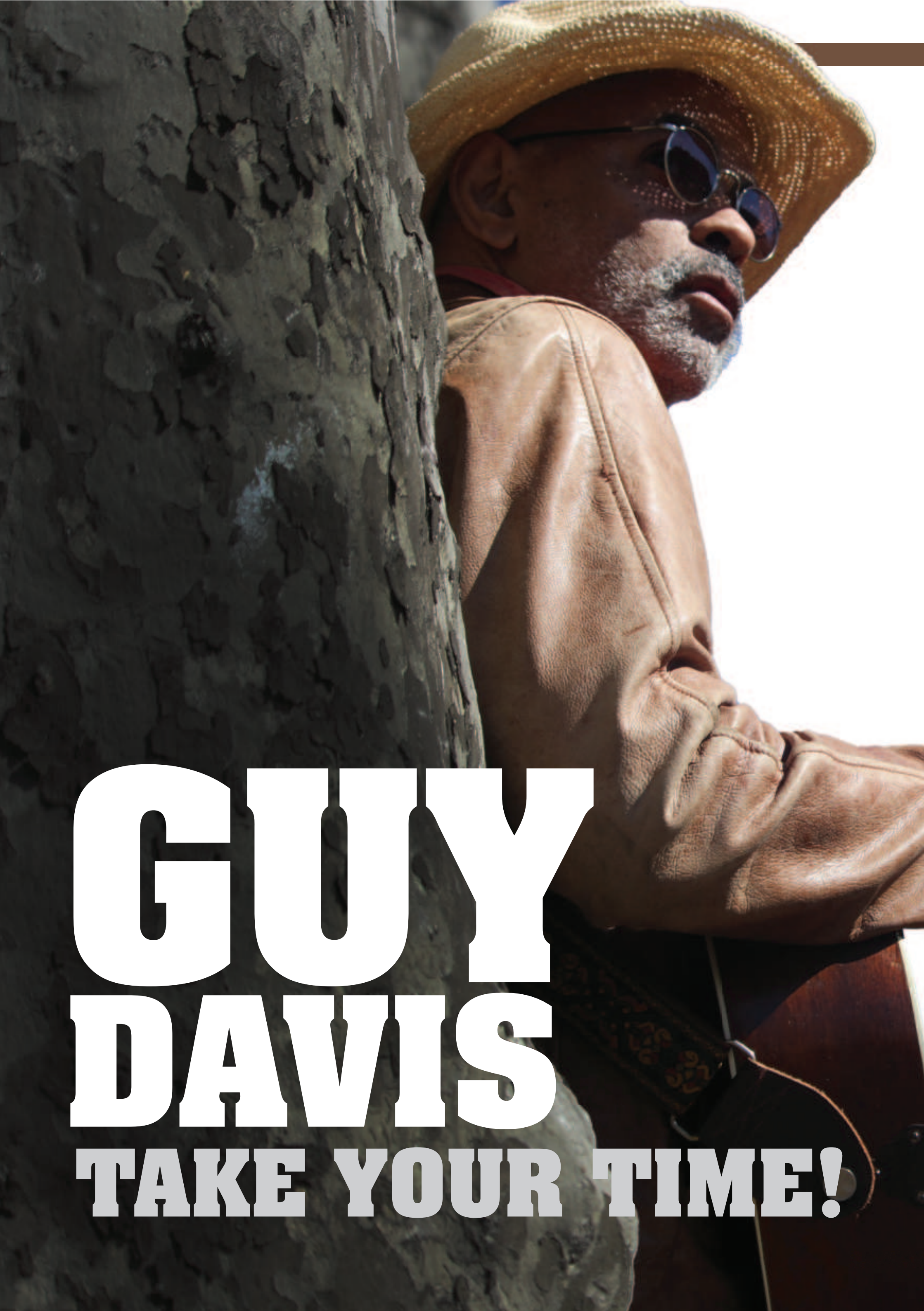

GUY
DAVIS
TAKE YOUR TIME!

I caught up with Guy Davis, singer-songwriter, guitarist and all-around troubadour of the blues genre, whose latest release Be Ready When I Call You is nominated for a Grammy Award. This incorporates all musical styles rooted in blues, folk and Americana at his home. We started talking about using live streams which have been invaluable to touring artists during the pandemic. Other topics ensue like his involvement with Pete Seeger and a lot of other musical anecdotes - sit back, relax and read on...

by **Colin Campbell** Images: **Supplied**

Guy quipped "Oh my gosh, when the pandemic started, I didn't know what I was gonna do. I was slowly going crazy each day in my house. I always play myself songs and that kind of thing. But I depend on going out to meet people. Finally, I broke down and one of the folks who corresponds with me on Facebook told me what to do and where to go and a few buttons to push. I tried it and then I was able to get a little limited thing going and then people kept talking to me over just the next couple of days. And then finally I had something I could stand in front of people and sing some songs. But that was not enough. I needed what we all need and that's community, so I created this place - Cafe Kokomo - based on my song the Kokomo Kidd. We play a theme song and greet each other (virtually) with a coffee salute."

A brief biography ensued. "When I was eight years old, I first went to a summer camp run by Pete Seeger's brother. There, I heard many of the folk songs that he collected and Woody Guthrie collected and brought out into the world. But I didn't know that some of those songs had authorship names like Leadbelly; I heard about a man who had sung his way out of prison twice! Also, I learned of songs about a convict running with a special pair of shoes with a heel in the front, and a heel in the back, so they couldn't tell what direction he's running to get away from the chain gate, these stories fascinated me."

Also at this Summer Camp, he started playing the banjo which he learned to play from a book by Pete Seeger; "It's beautiful. I absolutely love it. The primitive style that I specialise in is called 'claw hammer'. I did not grow up in my household listening to blues music specifically. Yet the music I heard in church had very similar harmonies. My grandmother was very religious. She and my grandpa were the blues people. These were the people that the blues used to be written about. I think I first heard the blues properly being sung by some white college boys on a street corner, and it's something that sounded like Howlin Wolf. I loved it. I knew in there, there was a sound, which was part of me, or I was part of it, and I couldn't identify it. At first, I didn't even know it had to do specifically with black people! So, I call myself a roots, blues, and folk musician.

Blues Musician or Blues Artist; Guy explains; "Now as far as being a blues musician and a blues artist, I don't see much difference, but I am different from any other blues musician in that I write, not just about a song but I write about the experience a song has on me. The story behind it. The people involved with it. I've given myself permission to be free with this music that was taught handed down from here.

Growing up, Gary honed his vocal style on influencers such as Nat King Cole; "He was more than just a vocal stylist. He was a brilliant singer. My voice serves me, and it serves well to tell stories. It's just I've gotten to play the

part of Robert Johnson who had a high pitch. I have that true flexibility, or that high pitch. I am an entertainer who needs to practice so that it becomes second nature."

He is a mostly self-taught guitarist but did admit to getting lessons. "I would say I had approximately two real lessons in my whole life on the guitar. One of them was from Huey Long of the Ink Spots. I would just sit on the side of the bed and just play the guitar over and over. I got to where I can hear something and eventually figure out the fingering on it. I can walk by a street musician; I don't even have to look it's right in my ear! I got more lessons on the banjo than I did on the guitar!"

Harmonica was the first instrument he played, this also at Summer Camp when he was eight years old. Even at those times, I didn't know where any of this was going to take me. I think I needed more exposure to feed a hunger that I needed. I am basically such a lazy fella."

His reasons for becoming a musician were many; "Looking back, there was something in my soul. I used to go to musical Theatre. When I was little my parents brought me to see musicals. All sorts of wonderful things on Broadway starring Robert Preston. They bring me to St. Louis Opera. Probably before I got rid of my diapers, I wanted to be up in front of people interpreting music and just showing what a star, I am! The ambition was there, and this has moved me very deeply. I remember getting an album by John Philip Sousa. I thought it was fantastic. It stirred me. This music rising and going down. I got to play the snare drum, bass drum, cymbals the tambourine in an Orchestra. Eventually, I went to school and studied music theory, music composition then to High School. My parents were gentle enough with me to give me the space to figure out what it was I really wanted to do. This world we all need the sound of the human voice to come to us. To touch us to rub against our ears. We need this and that is okay to an extent. We need to talk we need to communicate."

"All my life, anytime I've had the opportunity to tell stories or to listen, I dig into it. From my parents, not from their words, but from their actions. I learned that when you have an audience who comes and pays their hard-earned

money to see you to hear you, you owe them everything that's in you."

We talked about touring as Guy has been on the road. "Just last night I played in a town called Beacon which happens to be where Pete Seeger used to live. Folks came out to the Beacon Sloop Club where he would entertain at meetings. The Sloop Clearwater used to sail up and down the Hudson River. This was the first performance they've had there, since these past two years.It was very helpful, people opened their hearts and let me sing to them. Pete Seeger's last tour in 2008, we did a series of concerts. One in Pennsylvania I think, where I played a show where I sang beautiful songs like 'We Shall Overcome'. I recall people were so moved. I met Mary (From Peter, Paul, and Mary) and that was a helpful experience. I also opened for Odetta a few times. In Connecticut I opened for her. At one point we were onstage together, this was a heartfelt experience, and my mother was there as well. It was my parents who first introduced me to Odetta."

He has many influences on his career and cites Muddy waters and Howlin Wolf. "Howlin Wolf is the King of the Blues and Muddy Waters is The Pope. I can't explain why. I go to Festivals now and it sounds one long wailing electric guitar solo the whole day. Your ears stop listening! When Muddy Waters would play, he would sing songs that were very fundamental in messages. The solos were not so intricate but were so heartfelt, you couldn't walk away from them, they were beautiful. Eric Clapton came up with an album called Riding With The King. On the cover there's Eric riding the Cadillac and BB King is in the back. BB was at the end of his touring as a musician. Eric could play everything BB played but when BB played even though it was a shadow of the way he used to play, every note sounded like a human voice, it sounded like he was singing. In that fundamental quality I found what I was looking for in the blues. It's not playing blistering solos where someone can play ten notes more than I can manage, I'm not knocking it. But Robert Johnson can say more in one note than I can with eight!"

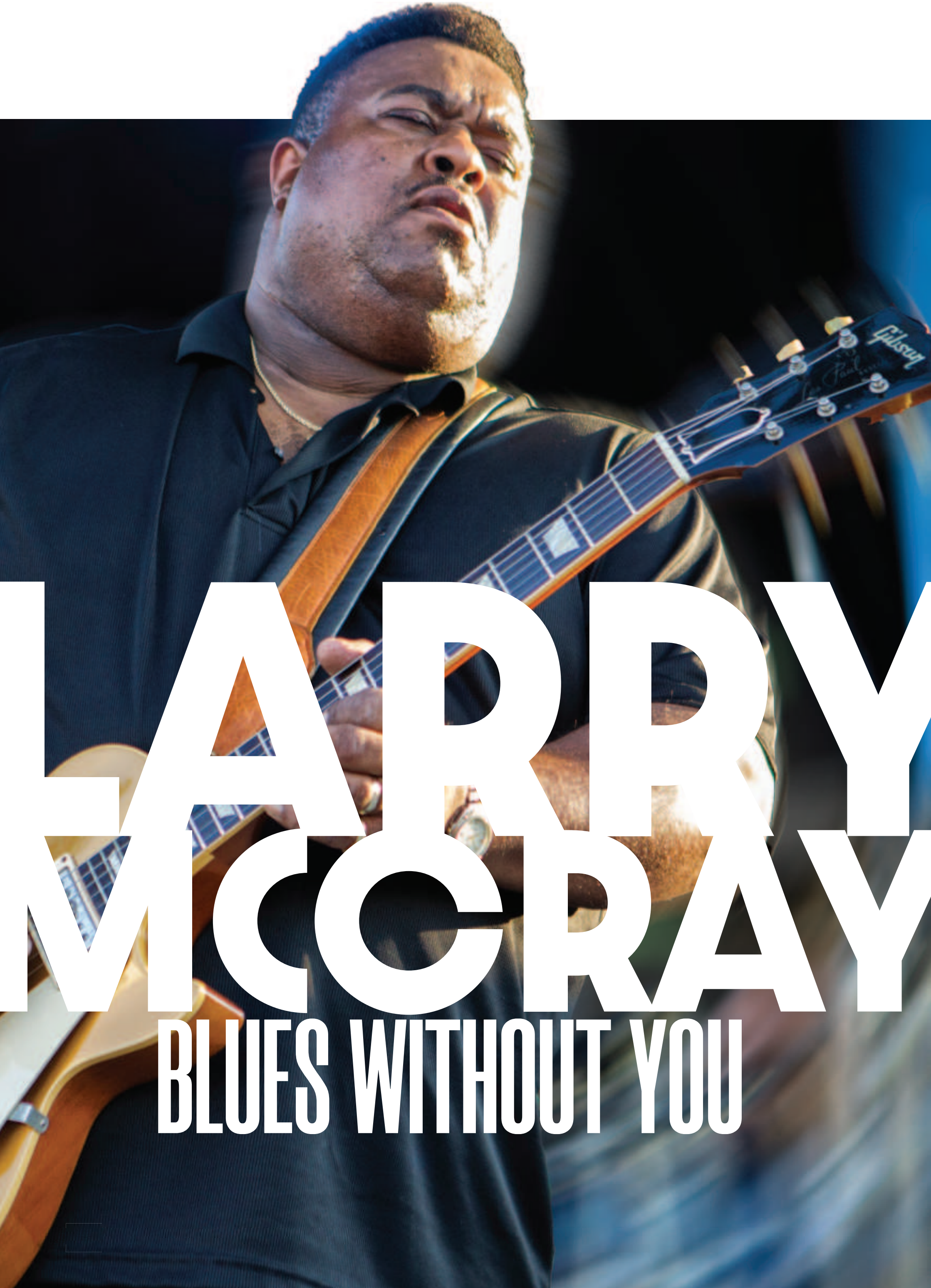
His songwriting style is something akin to catchers can can; "If a melody comes, I make sure how to work it out and look for words to come along. On rare occasions they stay together. The song, I Wish I Hadn't Stayed Away So Long, that was after the event of my mother's death in 2014. It's to do with being out on the road when someone is needing you at home, dying in this instance. The song came in one unit. I try to use what Bob Dylan calls the vomitation method. Whatever is in me, I put it out onto paper, all of it, then I take away what is not needed in the song."

I asked about what he considered the best advice he had ever been give: "In an immediate state of need. The advice was from Pete Seeger. I was onstage struggling to tune my twelve-string guitar. I got flustered. I heard a voice from the darkness say take your time and it was Pete. I translate this to anything, writing and singing. Don't try to rush past it, don't make it about hitting that one note. Take your time, own yourself. A bit like the Politician Bernie Sanders saying occupy yourself!"

Regarding future projects he is writing a play; "It's going to be produced for June this year. This is personal. It tells a family story that is inspired by a woman's death. Someone I have never seen; she was murdered by someone known to my family. This piece is how I perceive about this story. It's not all serious, we have a medicine show and everything."

Final words from Guy; "Music is a gift a rare gift and when you hear it live that is the best way. It's nice to have recordings but music being performed live is when it comes alive. Music on my latest recording, Be There When I Call You, I look forward to playing the songs on this in the UK."

guydavis.com



LARRY MCCRAY

BLUES WITHOUT YOU

Perhaps the downtime brought about by the pandemic was like a double-edged sword. For some musicians, it allowed them to work on projects they might not necessarily have had the time for, whilst others were able to spend time with their family.

by **Adam Kennedy** Images: **Arnie Goodman**

For US-based blues artist Larry McCray, having spent most of his working life on the road, it was the break that he needed. "The pandemic kind of saved my life," said McCray. "I had been on the road for thirty something years without a break. I've never had a break my whole career, where I could take time off because I had to hustle to live, to pay my rent. The way that it came about was very uncomfortable and un-timely, but it gave me the rest and sustenance that I needed to keep going."

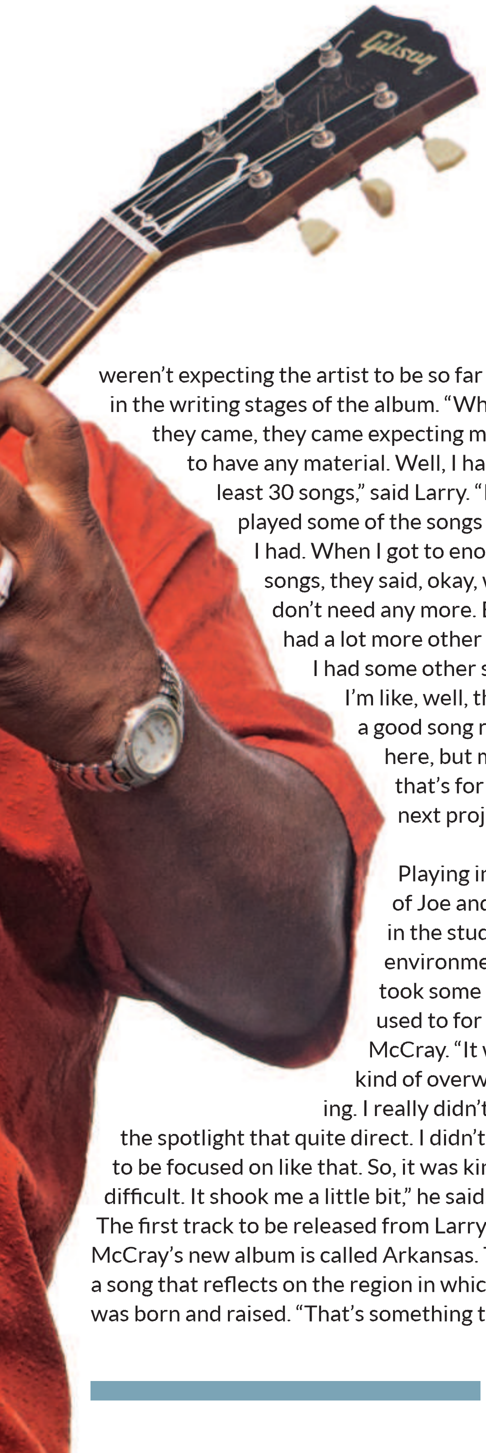
The artist's hectic life had started to take a toll on his health. "I had run all the way down to the ground," explains Larry. "I had cancer in 2015 and it was just from being run down. My body ran all the way down, and I didn't have any more resistance. So, it was time to take some rest. My body forced me to take a rest. It took me up until last year, from 2015 to feel good again, to feel like my body was strong again. It took me about six years to recover."

Larry McCray was starting to make peace with where he was at with his career as a musician. "I'm 62 this year. I've worked for long enough in General Motors to have a pension. So, I was trying to find my happiness. I was trying to find my acceptance. It wasn't what I wanted, but that's what I had," explains Larry. "I was like, okay, music ain't going to happen for me. It doesn't happen for everybody. Just because you aspire, just because you desire, or because you go out there and try, it's not a guarantee that you're going to be successful. I was trying to be at peace with myself. I'm trying to find my peace and acceptance and just trying to live." However, suddenly everything changed thanks to the artist's new album and his work alongside producers Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith. Following encouragement from a friend, a chain of events began to unfold. "This record project has had no method to the madness. The way it came about, the whole thing, it just kind of fell in my lap," explains Larry. "I had the same manager my whole career, and then last year he was killed in a car accident. When he passed away in a car accident, some different people reached out to me because they knew that I was kind of in a bad position. I didn't have any direction, and I had no one helping me anymore."

A friend informed the artist that Joe Bonamassa used to play Larry McCray's music on his show and would say good things. "I didn't believe him. So, I never took it seriously," said Larry. Following a friendly nudge, the bluesman began to try to get in touch with Joe. "He got the phone number for me from Larry Mitchell. Another guitarist that used to play for Ariana Grande and played for Tracy Chapman. Joe Bonamassa used to open shows for Larry when he was a kid. So, he and Larry knew each other. Larry gave me the phone number," explains McCray.

The US-based bluesman felt encouraged by the work that Bonamassa had done with his longtime friend Joanna Connor. "I text Joe and asked him what are the possibilities of making an album. What made me think that there might be possibilities was the fact that he had done something with Joanna Connor from Chicago. Me and her had been buddies for about 40 years," he says. "In less than an hour, he texted me back and said - yeah, I would love to make a record. So, we talked and had a good conversation. I didn't hear from him for eight months."

McCray began to question whether anything would come of the conversation. Further encouragement from his friend led to the artist reaching out to Joe Bonamassa once again. "I text Joe back again. Joe got back in touch after about a couple of days. He started making plans to come to Michigan. So, I said no problem. He said, I'll come to Detroit," explains Larry. "I had met Joe years before when he was in his young 20s. He was about 21/22 years old when I met him. But I knew Josh Smith from a kid because we used to play a lot of the same venues and a lot of festivals and stuff together. I met him when he was 13. So, I knew him from then." When the dynamic duo arrived in Michigan, they



weren't expecting the artist to be so far on in the writing stages of the album. "When they came, they came expecting me not to have any material. Well, I had at least 30 songs," said Larry. "I just played some of the songs that I had. When I got to enough songs, they said, okay, we don't need any more. But I had a lot more other stuff. I had some other songs. I'm like, well, this is a good song right here, but maybe that's for the next project."

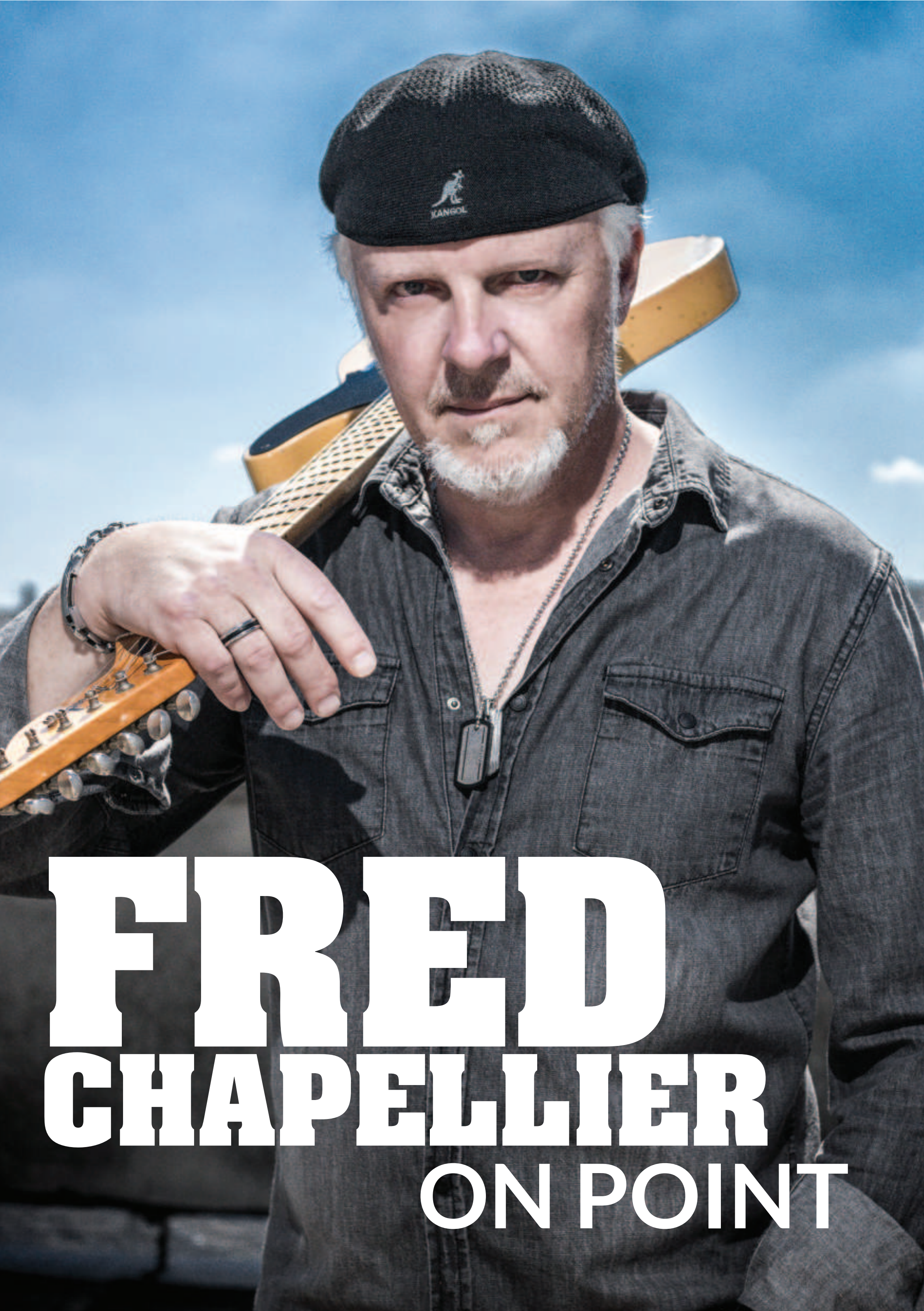
Playing in front of Joe and Josh in the studio environment took some getting used to for Larry McCray. "It was kind of overwhelming. I really didn't want the spotlight that quite direct. I didn't want to be focused on like that. So, it was kind of difficult. It shook me a little bit," he said. The first track to be released from Larry McCray's new album is called Arkansas. This is a song that reflects on the region in which he was born and raised. "That's something that's endearing to most black people that ever lived there and moved away. Everybody knows you moved away because of something bad.

Oppression, depression, financial destitution is what drove us away from those places," explains McCray. "Everybody dreams of a return, in a better position or a better day. That's what I was then but look at me now. That's the concept everybody dreams of returning home in a better place, in a better position. So that's important to a lot of people who have experienced that."

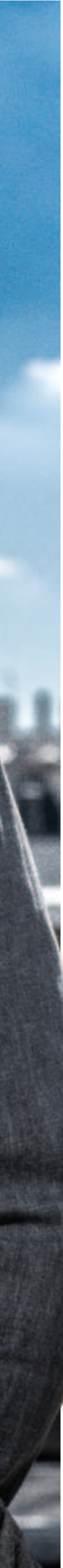
Larry McCray is an artist who writes about real life. "The music is inspired by itself. But I try to see it in a way that it could be anybody. I leave it open so that anybody that wants to own that music if this is what you're thinking, this is music for you. To help you express what you're dealing with in life," he said. "We all need the same, no matter what generation we live in or come from. We need the same things to live - we all need sustenance, we need money, we need food, we need a place to stay, we need love. These are the things that I tried to sing about. So, I try to make music for other people." The artist hopes that he can return to the UK in the not-too-distant future. "The first time I came through all those areas was with Gary Moore, and it was a hell of an experience to be introduced to the country by him. He played top-shelf venues; everything was wonderful. It made me know how wonderful it can be there. I hope that at some point I can see that level again. I hope I can experience those venues again," concludes McCray.

The legendary Detroit-based Blues guitarist Larry McCray will release his new studio album "Blues Without You" on March 25th. The album is produced by Josh Smith and Joe Bonamassa and will be released on Joe's non-profit label KTBA Records.

www.larrymccray.net



FRED CHAPELLIER
ON POINT



Fred Chapellier is a name that may be familiar to many blues-fans. As a veteran picker, singer-songwriter, he has been immensely successful in his homeland, France, where he is an in-demand touring artist and blues-rock stalwart. Over the years, Chapellier has worked throughout Europe and provided the essential support to countless artists. Now, signed to leading French blues label, Dixie frog records, he has a new album just out, 'Straight to the Point' featuring his broad-brush background and bursting with Memphis undercurrents and savvy.

by **Iain Patience** Images: **Philip Ducap**

I caught Fred at home and we chat about where he's been, who he is and where he's heading on the music-merry-go-round. With a soulful, Stax and Memphis horn sound rattling around,on the new album, Fred is quick to explain how he views himself and his take on the music: "I always say I'm like a mix of different things. I'm a bluesman, I'm a soulman, and I love rock'n'roll. Funky music with R&B, that's me really. So, my music is always a mix of those four things, those musical roots. I don't think I could ever record just a blues album or a rock album. I always want to mix those different styles of music. That's what I am," he explains with a Gallic shrug.

In past recent years, Chapellier has recorded an album of late UK blues great Peter Green's music, so I ask what his main influences might be: "I have three principal influences – Peter Green, Roy Buchanan and Albert King," he immediately confirms. "Roy Buchanan for me is a real hero. I don't know why he is not so well-known – maybe down to management issues or something else. He is one of the best and craziest guys around," he laughs at the thought. "I always think of him in same way as, say, Jeff Beck, as being similar musicians. It may be that Telecaster thing. I really love the sound of Tele players like Albert Collins, and Roy. I love that sound."

"I also love Stratocasters, 'cause I love Ritchie Blackmore, for example. But I love the feel of the Tele when I pick it up. When you play a Tele you have to sort-of fight with the guitar. I play Strats but always turn to the Tele. I guess it's just cause it's all rock'n'roll! I know it's only rock'n'roll but I like it," he sings with a laugh.

But Chapellier never treats the music lightly. To him, it's all about serious musicianship and comes with a history that in France has seen him play as a guitarist with some truly huge, historic music figures. In 2014, he toured with France's most famous rocker, the late Johnny Halliday, together with two other French musicians with huge followings. Halliday, 'Le Johnny' as the French often call him, is a guy who left an indelible mark on the nation's music. His funeral was nothing short of a state funeral with enormous crowds of tearful mourners. Even now, three years after he passed, seldom a month passes without some televisual or newspaper/magazine feature about the guy.

The other two figures – equally huge in France - were veteran French pop-star Jacques Dutronc and, Halliday's often partner in music, Eddy Mitchell. The threesome hit the road as 'Les Vieilles Canailles' – the old scoundrels – which pretty much summed it up at the time, a loose formation of French musical greats often likened to the US Rat-Pack of Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jnr and Dean Martin. Turning to this extraordinary work, Chapellier again laughs and explains:

"I've known Jaques Dutronc for many years and

it was really him who got me the gig. I got that because we're good friends and I've played with Jacques for about fifteen years now. When Les Viellies Canailles were about to go on tour, he told me 'Fred, you can be there.' And I replied, 'Yea, I'll be there.' It was just crazy to play with those three guys. Here in France, they really are legends. And it was easy because, especially with Jacques and Johnny, they were just rock'n'roll guys. You might not know this but Johnny was a huge fan of both rock'n'roll and blues music. He really loved blues music, and he loved guitar players. So, it was really easy for me. It was the music I play and love too. What I love about these guys, is like, Jacques is about eighty-years-old but he's still a rock'n'roller."

Chapellier then tells me: "Peter Green for me was just...how to say it? Peter Green is just the perfect guitar mix. He has it all. The feeling, the sound, the notes, the ability, the writing. He just has everything."

With the new album featuring many self-penned songs, I note on a number he shares the credits with US soul-blues singer Billy Price. Price of course was the frontman with Roy Buchanan for many years before striking out on his own: "Yea, I love Billy and his music. About twenty years ago, 17 or 18 years I think, I tracked him down and sent him a message

"It was just crazy to play with those three guys"

asking, 'Why don't you come out to France and do some gigs?" Billy replied saying, 'Yea, why not?' So, I sent him some of my music and he got back to me, said he'd love to come over and work with me. Now for the past eighteen years we've done many many gigs together, recordings together and most of all we really love writing songs together. It's so cool. Billy's a great guy and a great singer. We work together on his albums and on mine."

Chapellier laughs about really finding and being turned on to music by hearing the Woodstock Festival music when he was a kid in Metz in around 1975. The music turned his head and he was instantly in love with it, starting out as a drummer: "I started as a drummer in around 1978," he says. "Then in 1981 I switched to the guitar. It was such a revelation to me. But I still play drums and I think it's very important to me to also play rhythm like that. Even when you play guitar you must be strong with the rhythms, know just where they are."

So, do you reckon that might make you a better, more nuanced guitar player? Does it help having that background? I suggest: "Yea, I do. Oh yea, definitely. No doubt at all. I always start with a rhythm, it still helps me a lot. I have it in me every day. You know, it's kind of funny, because I always hear what it might sound like with the drums there when I write songs. I always have something really precise in my mind. I play drums with my drummer in the studio 'cause I must show him what I want to hear." Chapellier then swiftly adds: "I must say, he plays drums at least ten times better than me, though! I just want to show him my ideas. I always have good ideas for the drum parts, I think."

Having previously confirmed his love for Deep Purple and guitarist, Ritchie Blackmore, it comes as little surprise to learn that the band played a huge role in his own musical development and career development: "My drum hero is really Ian Paice. He is just fabulous. I've always loved his music and ability. The album 'Made in Japan' really changed my life. It was just so crazy, such a great album. I still listen to it now. And I met Ian Paice just once. He is such a nice guy. That album is really the story of my life," Chapellier roars with laughter.

Looking ahead, with Covid slowly receeding and festivals and gigs reopening across France, Chapellier is keen to again hit the road, to pro-

KANGOL

mote the new release: "I'm lucky 'cause I still have many gigs across France, of course," he says. "Cahors Blues Festival, Cognac Blues Festival (Cognac Blues Passions), and many other blues festivals; I've gigs coming up in Denmark and Germany. I love to play England, I've been a few times, opening for Wishbone Ash. I love it there. They love the music so much."

Fred finishes with a brief thought on the general perception of music in France, where traditionally, big balladeers often held sway: "There is a time here in France when we had those big singers, like Yves Montand and Edith Piaf. But it has changed with the likes of Jacques Dutronc – Jacques has always been a punk - and Johnny Halliday in the past.

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BLUES
BAND

It's hard to believe that The Blues Band have been together for the best part of 40 years. But as they say, all good things must come to an end. I was invited to do the gig review for Blues Matters Magazine by Dave Kelly at the Stoke on Trent gig. Which offered the opportunity to interview Dave about their final album, So Long. It ended up far more than that...

by **Stephen Harrison** Images: **Supplied**

We were delighted with an invite to the pre-gig witness soundcheck. And blown-away when Paul Jones came over and asks if he could sit in on the interview. We end up backstage sitting on comfy leather sofas, chatting with four members of the band, Paul Jones, Dave Kelly, Gary Fletcher, and Tom McGuiness. We start at the beginning, as good a place as any, How did it all come together?

Paul takes up the story: "It was my idea originally. Interestingly, I'd been thinking about it for over a year. I'd been influenced by what was happening in Essex, or more particularly Canvey Island, (The breeding ground for Dr. Feelgood). The Hope and Anchor, which was my local, in Islington, north London. I got chatting to the landlord and told him I'd had an idea to form a blues band. He didn't seem remotely interested at the time, then about a year later I told him that I was determined to put a blues band together; he said, 'there's always a gig here if you want one.' That was the response I wanted, so that's literally how it all started."

SInce 1978, The Blues Band have been thrilling audiences around the world with their own blues tunes and of course some great blues covers that have influenced them all and made them want to follow the path into the blues world: "There's a track on the album called Itchy Feet. That tells the whole story of the blues band. I called him (Tom McGuiness) Paul recalls.

Tom adds: "Hughie Flint was my neighbour at the time, He and I were in a band called McGuiness Flint, and we were sort of brothers-in-law. He was living with my wife's sister. We spent ages looking for someone else to join the band, a friend of mine had run into Dave Kelly, gave me his number. I called Dave, invited him on board, asked him if he knew any bass players that needed a gig? He said, 'well, I've been playing some gigs with Garry Fletcher,' So, that was that. The band was born".

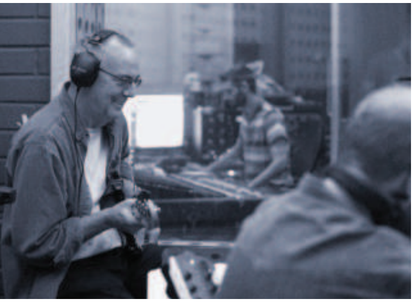
What is apparent as we talk is just how laid-back and comfortable they all are, chatting about how they came together, almost as an afterthought - let's put a band together, see where it takes us. Forty years down the line here they are. Paul, at the time, was a working actor in various productions; none of the band had any misconceptions that this would just be a short-term deal, certainly never imagining it carrying on for this length of time.

The first album was recorded live at The Hope And Anchor, and at The Half Moon in Putney, which had some recording equipment. An invitation to appear on the German TV show and all-round festival, Rockpalast, presented itself to the band, which had an immediate and profound effect. Gary explained that this was a big show all over Europe and beyond: "The great thing was, that he had got us on to one of the big events. Rockpalast was in a big TV studio."

Dave Kelly remembers it well: "We were on one of the really big ones, with Joan Armatrading, ZZ Top, Ian Hunter, and Mick Ronson were also on the bill. It was the first year that the USSR took it. It was transmitted from The Atlantic to The Pacific, they got it in Vladivostock, and Galway as I recall. England was the only major country that didn't take it,"

Kelly laughs with a shrug.

The repertoire of the band is such that blues tunes from days gone by sound as fresh and as important as they did when they were written. Original tunes that appear on the albums are sometimes written together or one of the bands will say hey, I've got this, let's try it out. There is no steadfast rule that determines how the original songs are written and put together. Dave Kelly remembers: "I wrote two songs with the producer of our first two albums for So Long."



"I wrote three with my wife," Paul explains. "A couple, I wrote with Tom."

One of my favourite tracks on So Long, is not what you would call a blues tune in a million years, nor is it an original tune, To Love Somebody, penned by The Bee Gees, is given a very distinct makeover by Dave Kelly who did the arrangement. This is not merely a copy of a popular song to fill an album. This is one of the finest arrangements of a song that I've ever had the pleasure of hearing.

Gary adds: "I didn't see it at all at first when we first played it, but as the thing built up it was obvious how good it was going to be. Outside of The Beatles they are right up there as songwriters."

Although the band has said that this is the last album and the last tour, and I've no need to doubt them, I get the feeling that there could be one last tour or one last album, perhaps a live album from this tour - we'll have to wait and see. What we have to take into account as well, is the fact that Paul Jones turned 80 years old on this very day we meet for this chat. The togetherness is still there within the band, the joy of playing is still within the band. So, who knows?

Watch this space as they say. As the interview continues, they talk about the possibility of doing a live album later in the tour, so I doubt this is the last we'll hear.

Paul Jones goes on to explain: "After this tour with The Blues Band, Tom and I go out with The Manfreds because we are still very much involved with that side of things. When we started with Manfred Mann, we were a blues band, however, Mick Jagger said, 'this is not a blues band, it's a soul-jazz group."

This leads me to ask Paul a question about a story that I was once told that Mick was not asked to be the original singer in The Rolling Stones: He quickly confirms: "Brian (Jones) asked me to be the vocalist in a band that he was putting together, little did I know that it was going to be The Rolling Stones. But if I had have joined, it wouldn't have been The Rolling Stones. All Brian said to me, was that he was forming a band, and he'd like me to be the singer. I'm not sure if Keith would have

joined at that stage. There was some talk of him being involved but I'm not altogether sure. I had good reason for thinking that Brian was being optimistic about making a living playing the blues - Alexis Korner hadn't, Cyril Davies hadn't. People played in folk clubs, but it wasn't a living."

I am intrigued as to whether Paul had ever told Mick this story? "I haven't spoken to Mick from that day when he said we were a soul-jazz band!" Tom suddenly pipes up: "We met him in New York" - Paul replies, "No it was Toronto".

Much discussion follows as to whether it was New York or Toronto then all four agree it was in-fact New York. Gary Fletcher chimes in: "The Rolling Stones had just signed Jim Carroll to their label, and we were on before Jim Caroll in this club." Dave interjects, "…as we knew The Rolling Stones were involved we reckoned that we would get a little bit more if we shared the promo gig which was essentially ours."

Gary carries on the tale: "I was doing the sound-check and sort of banging away on this rig. There was a single light bulb on the stage pointing straight at me so I couldn't see anything properly, the club was in darkness. Then this voice came out of the dark and said, you want a little bit more top on that mate, a bit more top, and I thought to myself, well, I'll be the judge of that, as this person got closer he's saying, yeah that's better mate. As he came into view I saw that it was Mick Jagger, I was gobsmacked, literally. And then by chance, I was at a garden centre near Richmond with my ex-wife, he taps me on the shoulder and said, 'Hi, It's Gary isn't it?"

Nearing gig-time, I have one last question for each member of the band; which cover song do they like playing most of all with The Blues Band? Tom: "I know what it is for me, 'Sitting On Top Of The World,' which I'll probably do tonight"

Gary, : "I don't get chance to do many really, except for my own songs, but if I had to pick a cover song, it'd be a Willie Dixon song, he's my favourite blues singer and writer, so I'd choose him."

Dave: "To Love Somebody"

Paul: "Smokestack Lightnin. We recorded it with The Manfreds in 1964 and we're still doing it to this day."

This had been one of the most intimate and interesting interviews that I've ever had the pleasure of being involved with. I felt that I'd known these guys forever, that's how welcoming and open they were. We said our goodbyes so that the band could ready themselves for the gig. The gig was just as enjoyable as this interview.

www.thebluesband.net

RONNIE EARL

HAVE MERCY

Ronnie Earl is a four times award-winning Blues Music winner for Guitar Player of the Year. He has released numerous albums, shared the stage with other greats of the blues; BB King and Albert Collins included. A masterful guitarist, who fronts his own band, The Broadcasters, he has a new album out, 'Mercy Me.'

by **Colin Campbell** Images: **Laura Carbone**

Earl's twenty-eighth album. It features twelve songs including eclectic musical styles and arrangements of songs by artists such as Muddy Waters, John Coltrane and Percy Mayfield. We caught up with Ronnie recently to discuss his career and the latest release.

First, we talk about being a musician, working through the pandemic:

"We have less work, but I don't look at it as work, I like playing to the people. Maybe now we play live once or twice a month that keeps me going, that keeps me happy! Debbie and my agency are hitting the pavement and trying to get us some more work"

Connecting with his fans is very important and one way was to concentrate on doing a new album, Mercy Me: "There are some old compositions and new compositions on the new album," he says.

Looking at the recording process, Ronnie explains:" We went into the same studio we always use and used the same Engineer. We record in a circle with no headphones on. We have some horns on the new album as well. When they come in, it's a nice surprise. I thought the band and Diane Blue played so beautifully; Diane is so wonderful! "

The band has road-tested two songs; Only You Know And I Know and Sun Shines Brightly. Both were received well by the audience:
"We were so happy to get back on stage. I couldn't wait. I was counting the days. Can I tell you something? I just saw my brother Anson Funderburgh. Even though I've known him for forty years, I never realized how incredible he is on guitar. I felt I was sitting close to God. He's a very humble person, I was humbled playing with him. Gabe Stillman was there as well. He has a lot of potential, a lot of energy and knows how to play guitar. I told him as you get older and learn to play guitar you know the notes to leave out instead of the notes to put in. I'm playing less notes than I used to."

We turn to consider song choices on the album. Ronnie said of Only You Know and I Know, that he's a big slow blues lover and player:
"I felt we would have something upbeat and happy, soulful as well. I remember Delaney and Bonnie from the South. That's a version we loosely arrange it around. I played in Memphis at BB Kings with Bonnie maybe twenty years ago. I didn't get to talk to her, but she was very powerful. That was with the Levon Helm Band. I think she was the first white vocalist with Ike Turner's Band," he recalls.
Next track discussed is John Coltrane's instrumental cover of Alabama: "There are still problems going on in the world with segregation and racism. There were problems with some of the Churches in Pittsburgh Synagogues. This revived what I thought John Coltrane was on about. (This was referencing the Birmingham fire) It has a solemn sound to me. I had a mellow tone, a sort of jazz guitar pretty tone. I conducted the horns as to when to come in."

"I wanted to do one of Muddy Waters songs and that was another upbeat tune, Blow Wind Blow. The theme of the album is you have to be able to give mercy before you ask for it. We need

mercy on ourselves as well as giving mercy to the world".

Asked about song-writing, Ronnie is contemplative and responds: "They just come out by using a bit of paper, then get that checked for mastering! Blues For Ruthie Foster came about because she is a friend. I played with her; I think she's one of the best out there. Peter Ward and I did our acoustics and we played around with Robert Johnson songs. That's how that song came about.

Soul Searching, I wrote with Kaz Kazanoff (saxophonist) for Roomful of Blues. It came to me. I just sit down with the guitar, do some movements and put in a little melody. On A Prayer for Today, Anthony Geraci helped write this one. I love his playing. He was the first piano player with Ronnie Earl and The Broadcasters. He brought me this song. Dave's Groove was written with Dave Limina. We all came together on this, including Forrest Padgett the drummer; he's a wonderful musician. We just wanted to do an old groove tune."

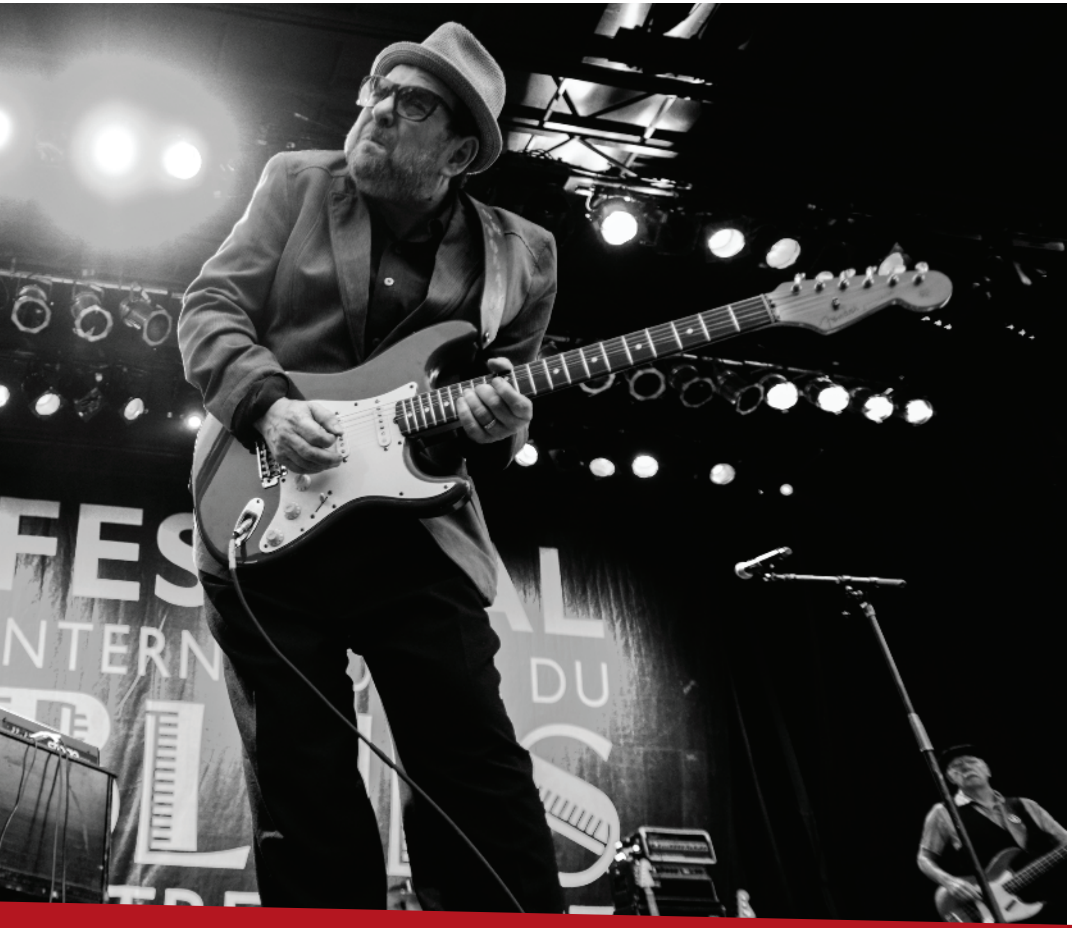
"We did a lot of improvisation. I'd start something and it developed. I was always like that, even on my first album. I don't carry sheets of paper and say this goes like this. I just go in and hope I inspire the band with my guitar, with my ideas and my soul. (Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher And Higher) is my wife's favourite song by Jackie Wilson. He didn't live long; he had a stroke and was in a coma for many years. I thought if we got a good version of this, we would use it. The horns feel they are from the 50s!"

As to the length of time the album took to make, it took only two days: "Some of those bands over the pond, like Fleetwood Mac, take a year to make one! I'm not a studio person, I like to get it down on wax and then leave!"

Ronnie is still doing guitar lessons and extols the virtues of guitar students like Tim O'Connor: "There's no blues rock, they learned from what I learned. I feel like myself and Anson are the keepers of the flame. I feel very blessed because the audience love my band."

"I still want to play in the UK, this has to be sorted out. It's the remnants of Covid that are stopping us just now".

His best advice to upcoming musicians would be: "Listen to the old masters and not just those with the big names. People like Louis Myers who was with Little Walter. I would say less is



"It was the highlight of my life"

more depending on number of notes you play. Find your own voice, distinguishing yourself from other players, things like that. Mostly, be a kind person. Be true to yourself, play from the heart. I'm always listening to Robert Junior Lockwood. Peter Ward the guitarist on the album is a good guitarist. I love all the old stuff, Otis Spann, Muddy Waters. I also love Duke Robillard's playing, I wrote Blues For Duke Robillard on the new album!"

When it comes to guitars, he still enjoys playing his Fender Stratocaster.
We discuss music he listened to at home when younger. Unsurprisingly, he mentions Hendrix, and Motown - Temptations, Four Tops, before adding: "I saw BB King and Albert King when I was eighteen at the Filmore East. That was incredible. I played with BB. It was the high-light of my life. I felt ten feet tall. That's why I mention be kind. He didn't drink, smoke or say

anything bad about anybody."

"Hubert Sumlin also had a beautiful and eclectic style. They should have a postage stamp for himself, T Bone Walker had this also, they bring a certain magic to the music."

When we last spoke, we talked about a book being written by Debbie Blanchard who was sitting with Ronnie and provides the latest update about progress.: "Second draft is done then looking for a Publisher. Ronnie was very sharing about the things he has done in his life. Everyone wanted to share something about Ronnie. There are some great stories. Sue Foley tells a story of incredible kindness. She was young and travelling with her first band. After telling the story, she says, 'We had been slugging it out on the road, we were getting kicked around, and then all of a sudden, these guys, who were our heroes - and are larger than life, and they gave us something that would help keep us going. The book is an authorised biography of Ronnie's life; Beautiful Child: The Life Of Ronnie Earl In Technicolor."

Ronnie takes each day as it comes: "Make it simple, you can start your day over as many times as you need to." Ronnie, reflects on 33 years of sobriety: "I don't have hangovers or feel bad about myself. I have the capacity to love other human beings. I take a day at a time. I've been thinking about making an album with Anson, he doesn't know that! I went over to Ireland to check out the music. I have Celtic blood and the Celtic music is like European blues to me.

Lastly, a few words to the Blues Matters-reading public; "I think it's a great name for a magazine. In more ways than one, Blues matters. Here, they talk about Black Lives Matter. I'm grateful to anyone who listens to my music. They have a choice and I thank people for listening to the new album and hope they enjoy it. We keep the blues alive by making new albums and doing live performances.Always nice talking to you, Colin. God bless you!"

ronnieearl.com

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KEB MO

BEING GOOD

Keb Mo is one of those remarkable bluesmen, a guy with top talent in both writing and guitar picking. Seemingly a near-permanent feature on the Grammy Award round, he delivers wonderful music with a voice that can be mellow and gritty by turns while always deeply rooted in the blues tradition. Blues Matters caught up with Keb at home in Nashville, as he gets ready to embark on a tour to promote his latest album, 'Good to Be.'

by **Iain Patience** Images: **Jeremy Cowart**

A few weeks ago, Mo announced the launch of a new album 'Good to Be,' co-produced by Mo alongside country music legend Vince Gill, who produced three of the album's 13 tracks, and three-time Grammy winner Tom Hambridge (B.B. King, Buddy Guy). Darius Rucker, Kristin Chenoweth, and Old Crow Medicine Show all make guest appearances on the album.

Catching Keb Mo proved kinda tricky. Always in demand, he is flat-out, busy working the media circus in preparation for the release of the new album. And, again, it's easy to think, he'll be heading to the Grammys again soon. And then, it happens. I catch the guy at home in Nashville, Tennessee, where he's relaxed and warmly engaging - as usual - at home in his studio in Nashville. We chat about a few of the tracks on the new offering: "'Lean on Me' is probably one of the finest, most famous songs about friendship. I wanted to record it to honor my friend, Bill Withers, who we sadly lost last year. What makes this version special to me is the contribution from my lifelong friend, the Freedom Rider, Ernest 'Rip' Patton, who passed on this year. This was the last time I got to record his booming bass voice. I'm gonna miss calling on my brothers," he says with emotion.

Turning to his latest album, we discuss the Grammy process when I say I reckon he's well on the way to yet another nomination and fifth award. Keb laughs at the idea, shrugging it aside with a confirmation that the awards are great, they're recognition of his music but more importantly they also serve to introduce more people to his music: 'To me, I just make records, I don't expect any accolades. That's not what it's all about. The Grammy, well that's for other people, I think. It's like being recognised by other people. It sort of inspires people, fans mostly'.

Mo then snorts with pleasure as he thinks about some of those others with Grammy Awards: 'Well, Bonnie Raitt got a Grammy. Then I got a Grammy. I'm a big fan of Bonnie Raitt, she's inspiring to me. I often think of Bonnie as my mamma, and Taj as my daddy!' An interesting thought when you recall that their last collaboration, 'TajMo' picked up a Grammy in 2017. 'It's all about the music,' he adds. 'It's not about me!'

But for many, it is at least partly about the man himself. Now a seasoned, even near-veteran performer, Keb Mo has weathered the changes and dipped his toe into modern Americana and dug deep into the world of traditional blues and roots music for almost half a century: 'I've been a performer now almost fifty years. I started out playing clubs, bars and such, a long time ago,' he laughs at the thought and the memory,

before adding: 'Certainly at least forty-five years since I became a professional, playing for a living, making a living from music now for around forty-five years. A long time.'

He recalls his album Bluesamericana, in 2014, as showing his capacity to look broadly across the music spectrum and is absolutely adamant that what matters most to him personally is just the quality of music: "I guess I'm pretty open-minded. I don't like the idea of genres. What matters is the music. It's like Taj, he's a musician's musician. He's real open-minded, loves the music. He's a bluesman, he has that vibe, but it all comes back down to just the music. I think much the same. It don't matter about genres, it's all about good music."

With the new album about to launch, Keb's happy to share the credit for the recording: 'Vince Gill brought so much energy to the whole project (as producer.) He knows what he wants in the studio. It all came together pretty easily, I guess. He definitely brings a vibe to it."

And he's such a huge figure there in Nashville, I suggest. A truly major Americana-cum-country picker: "Yea, he sure is. He just knows everybody and he's worked with everybody. It's a real honour to have him onboard," he instantly agrees, before quickly adding: "And Tom (Hambridge) is another guy who is so cool, just great to work with every time."

While always rooted in blues and traditional music, the inclusion of the likes of Gill and Old Crow Medicine Show highlight Mo's refusal to sit back comfortably in any single music school, niche or genre: "A lot of people think of music in terms of genres. I get that. I like to think of it as just music that I like. If that often happens to be blues, well, that's just how it is. It's that vibe. I just follow it, see where it flows, where it takes me. I like a musical cocktail, I'd say. Maybe a little blues, a bit of jazz, a bit of rock, gospel, country or whatever. I think I sort-of opened up more to the music generally many years ago. Look at it this way – when you're labelled as one thing, it can be hard to escape that description and break-out, back to the music you maybe love most."

And having already tried his hand at production work, he confirms he enjoyed the process and sees himself doing more in future. "I've produced a few albums and enjoyed it. It's all good. I would like to do more, looking ahead to the future.'

Keb Mo seems happily able to switch from acoustic guitar, through slide-work to electric fretwork with an enviable ease. When I ask about his own personal preferences, he chuckles and says: "guess I like acoustic more, though electric is good as an accompanying instrument. But acoustic guitar is more spirited, more independent, if you get that. If I'm into blues, it's pretty much gotta be acoustic."

And, what about his own personal favourite musicians, who does he turn to for inspiration and music? "Well, Bonnie Raitt, always inspires me. Taj always the same. And with electric guitar stuff, I like early electric… nothing after, say, (a short pause, as he gathers his thoughts) Little Milton, that's about it," he laughs again.

Turning to the writing process, and the new album in particular, Mo explains his approach and attack: "It's all pretty good, solid stuff, I think. I was trying to feel my way, feel what the record was. Once I get going with an idea, a theme maybe, the record sort-of takes over. You gotta let it take you, follow a stream of consciousness. This album has been around five years in the making. It took a long time coming but it's the

better for that, I reckon."

Preparing to hit the road again to promote the new release, Keb finds pleasure being out there, playing for the fans, but knows it's always good to get back home and relax a bit with the family: "It can be difficult. You can get too much of one thing or the other,' he jokes. 'On the road there's sometimes an anxiety build-up. Getting back home to my wife and dog, is always good. I get back home and that dog, it snuffles and the tail wags. I know, at least, that it's pleased to see me again!"

As we close, Keb returns to the theme of personal music heroes for a bit: "I think I said I see Taj as my 'Daddy.' Well, I think he's the man.

"I'm gonna miss calling on my brothers"

He's been around over four decades, playing and working the music. A genuine inspiration. A great guy, a great musician and, now, a great friend. I can hardly believe at times that get to work with the guy. That I can be recording with Taj Mahal. How cool is that. I get to share a stage with a true great. If anybody'd told me that would happen, back forty-five years ago, I'd never have believed them! To me, Taj is the whole game. I never dreamed of playing with Taj. He's been keeping the flame alive for over

four decades now. That's something else!"

And to end, I suggest that some might see Keb and Taj as mirror-musicians, maybe a generation or so apart, but part of the same continuum. Keb laughs at the thought and immediately straightens me out: "We ain't a generation apart, nothing like it. There's only about ten years between us. When I was a kid learning, say around 17, Taj was still only 27. He was already moving fast musically but we're not that far apart in age, like some people might think.'"

For the future, Keb is looking forward to hitting the blues highway and then returning home to Nashville where he already has plans for his next release: "I know a lot about music. I've taken courses, I've read a lot. I'm a self-taught musician but I've also had some private teaching down the years. I covered my old buddy, Bill Withers' great song, Lean on Me, on the new album. It's just such an important song, the lyrics have so much real meaning; support, love, friendship. It's got it all:

The new album, Good to Be, was written between Nashville and his childhood home in Compton, California, which Keb recently purchased and renovated. He often found himself reflecting on the idea of home and contemplating what it means to belong, what it takes to stay true to yourself: "You can't bring an attitude to Compton," he reflects. "You can't pose. You can't be anything but real when you're walking down the same streets you used to ride your bike on as a kid. In a lot of ways, coming back there felt like it completed me."

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COUNTRY MUSIC HAD A BABY, AND THEY NAMED IT RHYTHM & BLUES

by **Tim Arnold** Images: **Supplied**

Never has that been more evident than in Delbert McClinton's new album, "Outdated Emotion," (Hot Shot Records, April 2022). It's a virtual road trip back down to where they both came from: west Texas, where Delbert grew up, down to New Orleans, over to Memphis and Nashville – where he now lives – and on up the road.

Early R&B artists considered guitar soloing "country and unsophisticated." But it was indeed at the heart of early country music that was embraced by their southern cousins. Music that shared R&B's roots in Gospel and blues but used guitars - electric, acoustic and steel - and fiddles, and harmonicas to reach into the hearts of their largely white audiences.

Soon enough R&B artists realized the power that guitars and harps could energize their work with. But Delbert McClinton was way ahead of the game. It's all evident in "Outdated Emotion."

"I remember when I went to England with Bruce (Channel) in 1962 I'd already been playing harmonica for some time," Delbert is telling me in a recent discussion. "It caught me by surprise how innovative those people thought the harmonica was in Hey Baby (their monster hit in 1962, first released on LaCam Records, a Ft. Worth, TX label). You know you never heard harmonica in anything but folk music and blues. But that was an eye opener for me."

When they toured England back then, it was the Beatles who opened for them a couple of times. Yeah, the Beatles. Delbert spent time with them and showed John Lennon some harp licks that led to the lead in their early hit Love Me Do and later in Please Please Me.

But it was country, first. "Hank Williams was the very first person to shape my life. I always wanted to do a Hank Williams record." There are six Hank Williams cuts on his new album, each one with an unmistakable dose of Delbert. Settin' the Woods on Fire, with its steel guitar lead and harmonic vocals, shufflin' through a fiddle solo; Honky Tonkin is a bonus track to be released soon. It's got a guitar solo that sweetens up this heel tappin' country dancin' tune.

And then The Sun is Shining, kicks off with Delbert's hall of fame harp playing, a pure R&B 1-4-5 shuffle kick … "I got a brand new suit, a new pair of shoes, you can't lose with the stuff I use … I'm all dressed up, got no place to go." Might as well be singing Honky Tonkin': "When you're sad and lonely, and got no place to go, come and see me baby, and bring along some dough …"

First cousins. "Country music is white mans' blues," says Delbert, and he's right.

"That's all real people playin' real music," he's telling me. "All those songs, the feeling of them, the thrill that I got when I first heard them were powerful emotions. They shaped my career."

Stagger Lee gets "Outdated Emotion" off on the right foot, or left foot if you're a two-Steppin country dancer. Lloyd Price made it one of Rolling Stone's Greatest 500 songs when he cut it in 1960. Delbert brings this real story to life – when Stagger Lee shot Billy in the Bill Curtis Saloon in downtown St. Louis. It's got it all: horns, back-up vocals, same kick-ass kick, sax and keys solos.

Thing is, truth teller that he is, Delbert is quick to point out that it's not him doing the vocal intro … "The night was clear, and the moon was yellow, and the leaves came tumblin' down … " - it's one of his background singers giving it a melodic touch that smooths the edges of Price's intro. Then Delbert jumps in and owns it.

Delbert – between John Lennon and Bruce Channel – with the Beatles in 1962.

Speaking of dancin', Delbert re-recorded Two Step Too for this new album. His original was on his 2005 "Cost of Living" – but he's countrified it a bit by slowing it down a lick and fine-tuning his vocal timbre. Pure Hank Williams. There's more Hank Williams songs – including Jambalaya, with its Louisiana roots; and Move It On Over.

And right in the middle of it all is Long Tall Sally. Yeah, Little Richard's ground-breaking 1957 hit that blew open the charts and established rock and roll forever. And then Elvis' early rockabilly stuff made sure R&B and Country and Western roots were at the heart of it all.

"So we're sittin in the studio (Kevin McKendree's award-winning Rock House Studio in Franklin, Tennessee), and I'm saying ... what'd we wanna do next ... and I said, 'Long Tall Sally,' kind of jivin'. And my piano player – Kevin – says, 'yeah man, that's great, let's do that!'

And they do. "I don't sound like Little Richard (he doesn't need to) ... it is what it is." And what it is is a you-can't-sit-down so get-up-and-dance thing.

McKendree is a multi-talented musician, in addition to his production skills. "Kevin is a musical freak," from Delbert. "And so is his son, Yates, 19 years old. He's on there, too. Yates plays either bass, guitar or drums on all of these songs that aren't Hank Williams. And Kevin – on Sweet Talkin Man – he plays everything on that one: guitar, bass and drums. And piano." Delbert turned 81 and has announced he's giving up live gigs.

Coming off the road. (Although he'll do his 27th Sandy Beaches Blues Cruise in January 2023). "I've done enough of that." But I tell Delbert I'm thinking when this album comes out his fans are going to beg him to get back out there. "Yeah, well you know, money talks, bullshit walks ... I could probably be persuaded to go do a show if somebody wanted to give me an unbelievable amount of money. If it happens ... you'll see me out there again.

"But I kind of doubt all that, you know, I'm done with the road. I don't want to see any more hotel rooms – especially with red carpets. I spent my life doing that, and I got a lot of joy from all those years on the road. I don't want to be somebody out there making believe."
That would never happen. Anyway, Delbert McClinton's got a lot of logs in his fire, including new recordings. "Or I could do an album that just had stuff I recorded with other people, as a guest artist. That part of me is certainly not dead and gone. But 15 hour bus rides are over."

"Call Me a Cab" wraps it all up. But it's not exactly music. It's an attitude. "Well, we were down in Mexico, writing. And we'd been sippin' whiskey. And there was a lull in the moment and I said ...'call me a cab. I gotta go.' And Kevin was recording it on his iPhone. And when we got back to the studio Kevin's son put an upright bass on it. Kind of like the early beatnik things back in the '50's.

"And that's the last thing on the album." A proper footnote.

The music on "Outdated Emotion" is going to touch emotions you may not even know you have. Or forgotten you did. He's won four Grammy's. So far ...

"How come you think those emotions are outdated?" I'm asking. "Well, they're from the past, and we're in a generation that has never heard Jimmy Reed, or Ray Charles for that matter. Or any of those people. And music has been dumbed down so hard these days it's hard to feel those kinds of emotions anymore."

Well, they're back. And you'll feel every bit of them in "Outdated Emotion."

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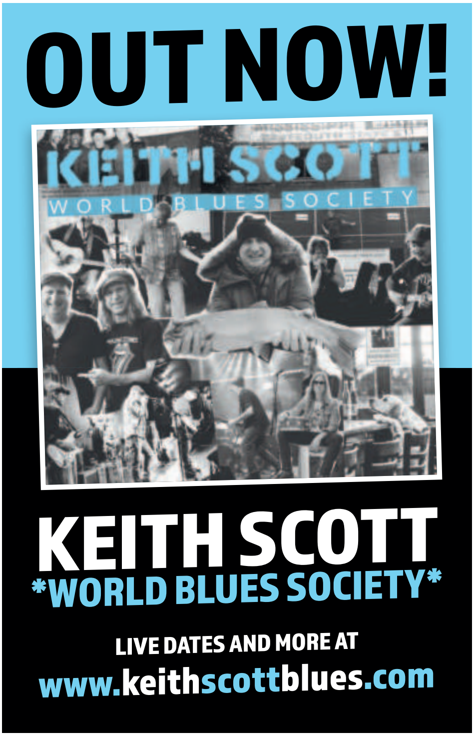
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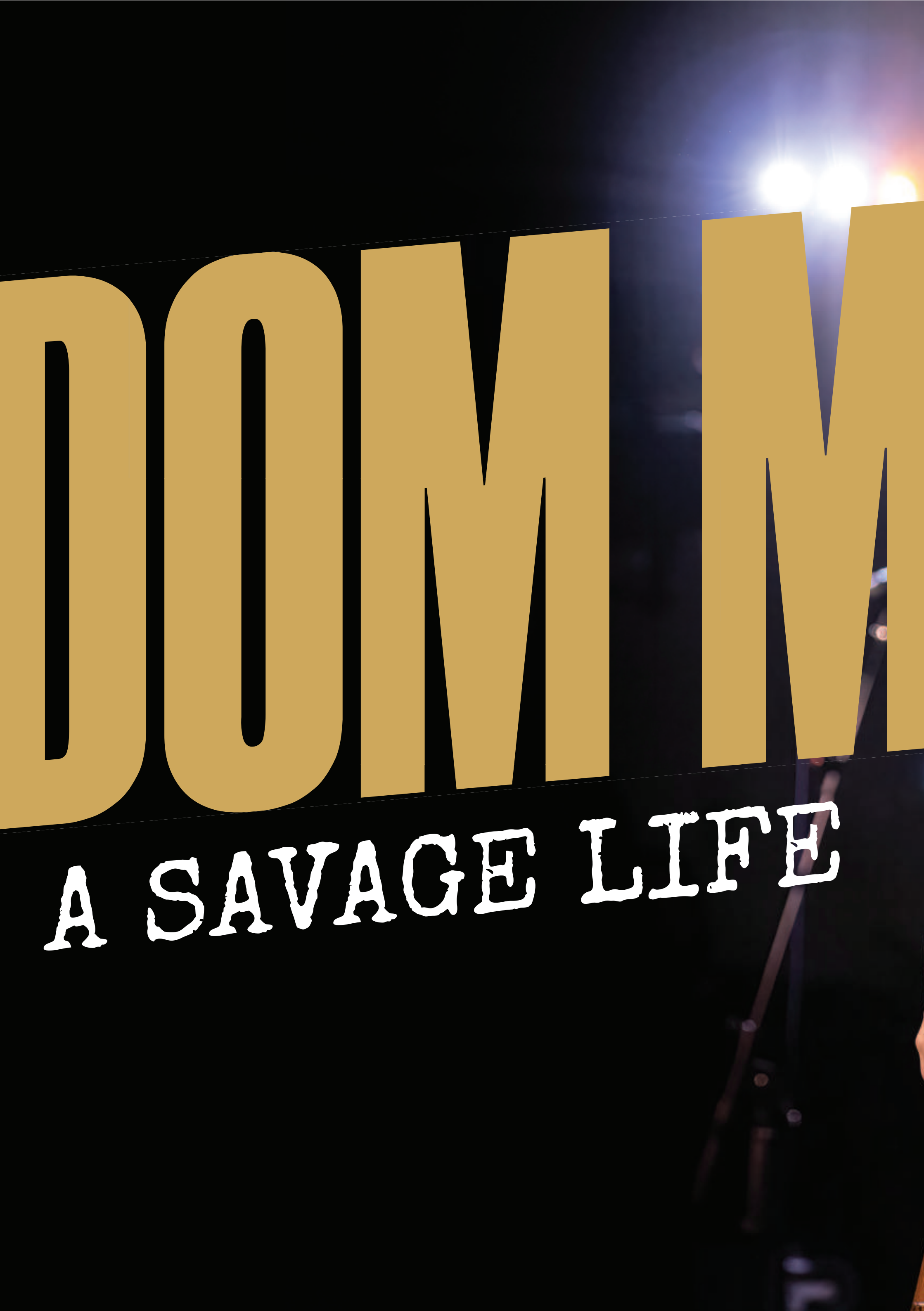

DOM M
A SAVAGE LIFE

I was lucky to catch-up with an old friend recently, singer-songwriter Dom Martin. Dom will be representing the UK at The International Blues Challenge in Memphis later this year while also releasing a new album, 'A Savage Life.'

by **Colin Campbell** Images: **Tony Cole**

Starting out on all things Dom, included a chat about surnames, Martin onstage and Savage off stage: "My dad's name was Savage, fourth generation of family; don't know where we came from before that, Europe perhaps. The Savage name always got me into trouble, so obviously something has happened in the history of the Savage name," he laughs before adding, "We must have done something bad. I couldn't get a gig under name of Savage. Martin is my confirmation name. It's the Catholic thing, I'm not part of that. I picked the name Dom Martin and I got gigs. This was around the same time I met Audrey and Fenton Parsons."

The new album is 'A Savage Life': "A recognition of my life and my dad's name." Martin goes on to explain.

This leads to a discussion about the album, highlighting a growing confidence in himself as an artist: "Before, I was worried what I was going to do; what I say and how I look; what's going to come out of my mouth when I try and sing. As far as making an album goes, it was a tough one. Nothing went the way I wanted it to go. We learned a lot on this one! I also wanted the under-produced, raw sound that it has. I'm able to replicate this on stage. This is very important. Fair-play, people make albums and can't reproduce them onstage. That's fine. That's a studio album, what it's all about. But I can't; a lot of these songs are one-takes- one was written the night before we went into the studio. The first studio we were in was wrong for us. We wasted a lot of time and money on that. I was convinced it was unsalvageable. The whole thing was a bit of a train wreck. The songs were totally torn apart, disfigured in such a way I didn't recognize them, which was sad because they are decent songs and I put a lot of work into them. I then started doubting myself; the confidence dropped in the whole album. Communication between us and the first guy that was trying to record it was awful. We had to find some way of continuing even though I was so disheartened with it. There was no reset button to this, so we had to work with what we had."

"Luckily, we found two guys in Dublin, Chris O'Brien, and Graham Murphy (The Production Suite) through a friend. He gave them the music and they thought they could fix it. We met. Chris pointed out what was wrong with it, and I agreed. There's stuff that you can't unhear! I knew this album wasn't going for perfection. It is what it is and had a very rough birth. The more I listen to it now, the more I like it! I was in a fucking state with this one. I have to curse to get the point of how serious I am. People will judge me on this one; it was mediocre at best, but they turned it around. Lesson learned! I'm looking forward to the next one. There was stuff in the background. Flash had passed on when we were recording. None of us were in a good place. We played like a three-piece, live all at the same time. That was the highlight of it."

Onto some titles: The Man from Nowhere: "With its scratchiness and the stylus sound. The only way to get that song to sound good was to make it sound bad. The idea was to put a stylus effect on it, to sound old. I found something on YouTube that was like an eight hour long scratchy sound and that was the only way to make that song sound good. It worked well. Here Comes the River: "I wrote this in the early hours of the night before recording on the last day we had. I gave it no thought whatsoever.

It's just what came out of the guitar at the time. Vocal-wise and lyric- wise it wrote itself. It was easy. It's a heartbreaking song about a guy at the end. It comes from passed people, like my dad and his life's experiences that have spilled onto mine. I carry this weight,like the sins of your father and all that. A lot is for him, my son, none for me which is good. On the next album, I can't say it will be better than anything I've done but it will be less personal. Different I think, who knows Colin!

Martin follows up about the theme running through the album: "Pretty self-explanatory. Take the song Addict. I wrote this when I was fifteen. I didn't want to put this on the album. It's so old and gave a glimpse of what I was into back then. It's not a happy song! The thing I do - if you want to talk about it being a job description - is to make people feel; and if you listen to that album and don't feel anything then you're dead and I can't help you. If you do, then we can talk. Even with the last album 'Spain to Italy.'"

The album brims with musical styles and genres. One song, for example, The Parting Glass, "... is a Scottish song written by an unknown person. That mystery to me was interesting. It was replaced by Auld Lang Syne and was like the Irish farewell at wakes. The tune from it came first." This song is the only cover on the album. Parts of the album are dedicated to Flash, The Maxwell Shuffle."

"All his favourite guitar players are there, from Stevie Ray Vaughan to Joe Bonamassa, all those influences of being a guitar player that he loved. I'm glad he heard this before he died. If someone wrote a song for me when I was dying, I'd want to hear it!" Martin says.

There are differing chord structures on Drink in Blue Colours: "It goes from soft and sweet to mayhem, which was the intention. The guy recording this first was all against what that song sounds like! He had me doubting myself on what I was using to get the sounds out. All you hear on the album, none of it is preproduced, all is me using what I've got, amps, pedals. None is about people adding to it. It wasn't put through any top-of-the-line fancy equipment. I have not met anyone brave enough to make an album like this, so far. Everyone puts their music through some filtering process or airy-fairy magic-dust that someone spent ten grand on! The last day we were in the first studio, I said not to take anything out of the songs!"

"I thought I was done with writing songs about my dad on 'Spain to Italy,' but Echoes is for my father and mother. It took a long time to get the lyrics the way I wanted them to be understood. Otherwise, nobody understands the subject matter," Martin explains.

This starts a conversation about songwriting, about whether melody or lyrics come first.

"On that one, the music came first. It was experimentation with sounds, and colours I guess. The effects I use on this are not over-the-top, but you know something is being used to make that sound. That's what I like about it. I can use this on stage. It's a self-sustainable song, that's the idea. With the last album, songs like Dixie Black Hand, I can't replicate the sounds on stage. I added a bit to this so I could, though, and this joins The Maxwell Shuffle, mixing Led Zeppelin and Hound Dog Taylor. it's an epic on its own.

Unsatisfied: "I wrote this in the first studio to show the guy how deeply unsatisfied I was with the production. Blues On The Bay;, I ask? "This was cut on the album. I wrote it as a tribute to a Festival at Warren Point. As a kid, I saw Peter Green and Van Morrison play there, and because it's in my country, I made it a dream goal to play there. It's not anything the Festival will identify with. It's for the Festival, a hat off to my younger self. It's almost twelve-bar blues as well."

And, 12 Gauge, I ask: "I wrote this twenty years ago, no idea what it's about. It's a good pumping Celtic Rock song inspired by blues. A

real ZZ Top-vibe that is completely unintentional. It's the way it turned out. It's a live song in that the way you drop pick-ups during the song. I can listen to my music as an outsider now, something I never used to. I listen to this album but still hear all

"I play from the heart"

the bits I'm unhappy with. I have to be happy with what I've got. I always thought my dad didn't leave me with anything, but he did really, he left me this talent - or guitar addiction! I am in another realm of impatience if I do not have a guitar in my hand. I don't practice. I don't sit down and have a goal in my head. I never approached playing guitar as being the best, or note-for-note perfection, like Joe Bonamassa, for example. I play from the heart or the sheet. You'll know if I'm not happy with a gig. The standard I've set myself just wasn't there sometimes. One gig was the Gig in The Garden, an invite only gig. I felt awful. I didn't want to play or sing for anyone. I felt out of place. It was an awful gig. So, I thought, others loved it. In a band-tour there's always going to be a gig that's bad. Recently, one at Greystones in Sheffield was one of the worst I've ever done. We were an hour into the rocking band stuff, and I had to tell everyone If they wanted a refund, the sound was so bad on stage, I'd be at the front door when you're leaving! Nobody did."

"I'm not in this for the money. I have thirteen pounds in my account; I'm waiting for the electrics to go off so I can pay that. I'm not alone with these problems, but music is all I can do. I've had lots of jobs for no reward but it's led to this point. I'm lucky because I have a family that's behind me. This friendship with Fenton and Audrey goes beyond music. That's what I always wanted, and it's been a beautiful thing to experience. You get to tell your story and tell the truth. I wrote songs because I needed an outlet of what I was going through at the time."

Stylistically, ultimately, Dom Martin just plays his own blues: "It may not be something you feel comfortable listening to, but I knew blues before I knew what blues was. Blues gave me an identity," he laughs.

Finally, Martin will be in Memphis, USA, playing the International Blues Challenge in May. We laughed about me wanting to be his roadie: "Just say it's for work and they'll pay your flight," he jokes as we finish. Good luck to Dom for the future. It sure looks very bright for this Belfast boy.

Dom Martin's new album "A Savage Life" is released by Dom Martin Music on Friday 8 April 2022. Dom is the UK representative at

the International Blues Challenge in Memphis from May 3-9. Dom is special guest on Eric Gales' June 2022 UK tour.

www.dommart.in

EDGAR WINTER

A CAREER TOPPING HOMAGE TO BROTHER JOHNNY

Eight years after Johnny Winter's passing, it was finally time for Edgar to make Brother Johnny consisting of 16 songs from Johnny's half century career and one Edgar original. Each features Edgar playing keyboards, guitar and/or singing with guest artists from a cross section of the rock and pop pantheon.

by **Don Wilcock** Images: **As credited**

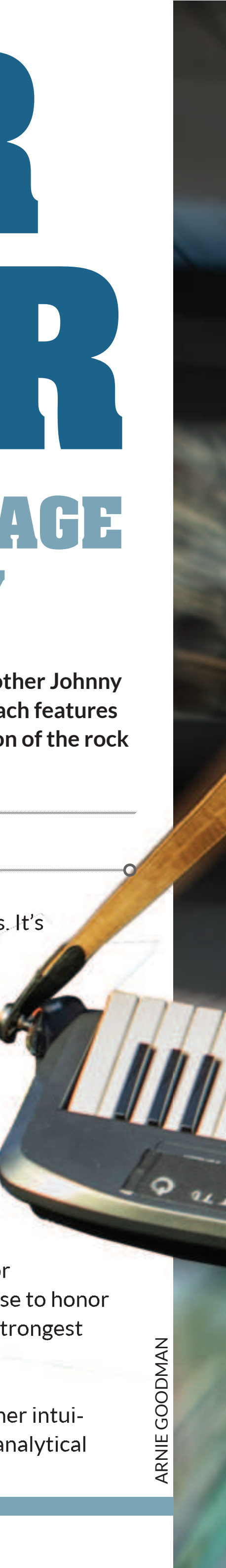
Eight years after Johnny Winter's passing, it was finally time for Edgar to make 'Brother Johnny,' 16 songs from Johnny's half century career and one Edgar original. Each features Edgar playing keyboards, guitar and/or singing with guest artists from a cross section of the rock and pop pantheon.

"It's one of the most intense and rewarding experiences of my life. I thought it might be difficult, emotional. There's been a lot of both joy and tears along the way doing it, but for me writing and recording has always been therapeutic, and this is something that's such an intimate theme.

"I prayed throughout the whole process. God, please just let me finish this. I had no idea. Covid was raging, and all of this stuff was going on, and I said I just want to get this. It's very much a Covid album in many ways, in many, many ways. I had a lot of performances, and thankfully I was there with the artists for 80% of those performances."

Johnny would have liked his brother's homage: it wasn't done primarily to sell product, and it wasn't done to sound like Johnny. Not only was it therapy for Edgar but also as a creative exercise to honor an older sibling who was Edgar's strongest inspiration.

"I asked my wife Monique. I trust her intuition more than my judgment and analytical



ARNIE GOODMAN

GETTY IMAGES

thinking, and she was all for it. She said, 'You owe this to yourself and to the world. If it weren't for him, you wouldn't be where you are, and you definitely should do it.' And so, her love and encouragement were the main factors that decided me to do it."

Johnny opened the door for his brother. "(Music) was my own very personal private escape world as a kid. Johnny and I were completely different in that he had the drive and the ambition. He wanted to be a star, and he watched Bandstand. He had this huge record collection and was Johnny Cool Daddy with the pompadour, the shades, the girls, and the guitar. I was the quiet kid that played all the instruments. I had a deep love of music, but I was very personal, very introverted."

With the possible exception of Jimi Hendrix, Johnny Winter best filled the gap between African American electric blues and what we in America called the British Invasion. His complete mastery of slide guitar alone came close to the styles of Elmore James, Bobby Rush and Earl Hooker, and he had a unique ability to turn his stark white albino countenance into a fashion statement that made him stand out visually in a way that checkmated the Carnaby Street dandies and Haight Ashbury sartorial freakouts that preceded him.

Most importantly, he was able to juggle 'real deal' blues with heavy rock guitar flings before heavy metal was invented and kept a large fan base enthralled for more than half century in spite of a drug problem that threatened his very existence until late in his career.

Paying homage to his memory of Johnny was a tall order for Edgar, the result of which is more sterling than I could have imagined.

"I didn't want to do a nostalgia album," explains Edgar. "I could easily have gone around to a lot of the people Johnny played with over the years and done sort of a nostalgia reunion album, and I could have done a straight blues album, but I think if I had done that, I don't think Johnny would have liked that. I think he would have said, 'Hey, all of a sudden you're adopting my exact style and trying to copy my exact music. That's not you!'" The guests who include everyone from Billy Gibbons to Keb Mo are not there for

GETTY IMAGES/ RICK DIAMOND - ATLANTA FULTON STADIUM

name recognition. They are not trying to emulate Johnny's techniques, but rather take the songs Johnny was best known for as a jumping off point for their own contributions. This was a difficult task for Edgar who admits in this, only his second interview since completing the project, that he's glad it's over.

On Brother Johnny, Edgar reprises 'Mean Town Blues,' a song his brother delivered to half a million fans at Woodstock. Edgar sings it with an almost vicious tone, and Joe Bonamassa plays slide guitar. Edgar recalls that day in 1969 at Woodstock. "I think he'd already done 'Mean Town.' I wasn't on stage at that moment. Johnny would do the first part of the set with this blues trio, and then he would say, 'And now, I'm going to bring on my brother Edgar.'

"I really mark that as the beginning of my career. When that moment occurred, I thought how did I get here? This can't be happening, and it just made me realize that music could be much more than just artistic expression. It could actually reach out to people, and bring them together in a unique way that I had never even considered before, and that's when – after Woodstock I started to think what it might be like being an artist rather than just a musician.

"Woodstock was an epiphany like a transfiguring moment just looking out over the inland sea of humanity and seeing that whole thing being set against a social set of civil rights and peace movement. There was a feeling of unity, being part of something bigger than yourself, maybe of making some kind of real difference.

"Woodstock changed my life. There's no doubt about that. I'd never really thought of music as a career. It's part of who and what I am, it's something that I am rather than something I do. I was more interested in jazz and classical music and thought of myself as a more serious musician. Thankfully, I've gotten over that."

'I'm Yours And I'm Hers' was the first track off

ABOVE: Edgar with Joe Bonamassa
BELOW: In the studio with Taylor Hawkins (Foo Fighters)
BOTTOM: With Kenny Wayne Shepherd

Johnny's 1969 LP titled just Johnny Winter, a defining marker in establishing Johnny as a slide guitar juggernaut. Fittingly, Billy Gibbons and Derek Trucks take this one on.
"What a character Billy is. He completely tore it down. We were completely tearing the sound apart and editing before he even started to do anything, and I really loved the fact that he sort of re-envisioned the song, and then Derk did his part later after Covid.

"I didn't not get to meet Derek either, but his solo, man! He's a slide player. Johnny, like you said, plays old traditional style of slide guitar. It's a dying art. Johnny is the only one I ever heard do it.

"Derek Trucks has a unique slide style all his own. He'll do really precise turns. He's a great player, and that solo is killer, man."

'Lone Star Shootout' is probably the most startling example on Brother Johnny of Edgar giving the guest artists carte blanche. Keb Mo shares lead vocals with Edgar and plays all guitars and bass, and the result is very down home.

"Keb Mo is one of the people I did not get to meet. When I came up with that song, I said, I've got to have some real authentic blues guy. It's gotta be the real down-home thing,' and I just had like a keyboard part, like a simulated slide guitar, and I did it Johnny style. I did all of that stuff on keyboard and sang it in this real gruff-like Johnny voice. Then when Keb Mo agreed to do it, he first threw all of that stuff out. He started from scratch, and he did this Keb Mo thing, and then (his) vocal was just ridiculous with what he'd done. And I said, 'Wow! Listen to this, Keb Mo!' Like I completely headed my vocal in more of a natural story telling kind of voice."

'Got My Mojo Workin' features Bobby Rush on lead vocal and harmonica with Edgar playing piano. "He started to play that song, and I went, 'Oh, this is the real deal. This is it.' When he started singing "Mojo" and playing I couldn't believe this guy is in his 80s. It was really special when he did this song.

"He had all these great Johnny stories, and it was just such a heartwarming experience. There was like an instantaneous connection, and it actually felt like family, and he came and he went out and got the old bullet amp, set it up with the harp, and then he started to play that song, and I went, 'Oh, this is the real deal. This is it.'

"I wanted to do 'Mojo.' Johnny loved Muddy, he loved Chicago blues, and he wanted to do 'Mojo.' So, I considered it not just a tribute to Johnny, but to Muddy and the Chicago blues.

Edgar is center stage in 'Drown in My Own Tears' with no guest 'stars.' "I felt he (Johnny) was there when I was doing 'Drown in My Own Tears.' I broke down several times and cried, but I was so touched when Johnny did that song originally. I think he did that song for me because there was much blues. He knew how much I loved Ray Charles, and I always felt he did that song for me. I wanted to sing that song back to him in the same way he had done it for me so many years ago when he was so alive.

"Joe Bonamassa wanted to play on that song. I think he did play some fills on there, but I wanted to do it the same way Johnny had done it without guitar. I was thinking of him as I sang it."
'When You've Gotta Good Friend' is quieter than most Johnny Winter songs and features Doyle Bramhall II playing outside his wheelhouse on acoustic guitar and on lead vocals. "This was something that Ron Hogarth (producer) said, 'Doyle can do that,' and I'd never heard him do anything like that. He said to me, 'Trust me. He can do it.' Doyle has it down in a very studied kind of way, but I think it's a great tribute to that style."

'Rock and Roll Hoochie Koo'and 'Alive and Well' were the first two songs when I thought of what

my song list was gonna be. I wanted to do songs that were most appropriately Johnny, that people would expect to hear. Johnny himself stopped doing those songs in his set in later years, and I think those were more rock songs. After Johnny And, I think he more turned to rededicate himself to the blues and stopped doing a lot of the rock stuff."

Edgar sings on both 'Alive and Well' and 'Rock 'n' Roll Hoochie Koo.' Steve Lukather, best known for his work with Toto, plays guitar on 'Rock 'n' Roll Hoochie Koo,' and Kenny Wayne Shephard plays guitar on 'Alive and Well.' Rick

"I really love this album"

Derringer was the original guitarist on both, and it was with Rick that Johnny enjoyed his greatest commercial success. Unfortunately, Covid prevented Edgar and Derringer from getting together.

Edgar wrote 'End of The Line,' the only new original on Brother Johnny.

"When I got the idea for the title, I said, 'End of the Line.' That'll be the last song I'm doing. and I started to write it. I became aware, oh, it's the end of the line. I'm writing about our family. I'm writing about the Winter lives. Johnny and I are the last remaining Winters. Now that he is gone, I am the last of the Winter line. So, it's a very emotional song."

Brother Johnny is Edgar Winter's defining moment as someone unique from his brother, and this album is a defining work: an homage, yes, but a message to Johnny that his influence was just that, an influence. Edgar is his own man, too. Johnny would have wanted that.

Edgar recalls a time before he was old enough to speak: "I remember being nestled in my mother's lap and just hearing this beautiful music flowing over me and trying to pull myself up, and I could just peak over the keyboard. I could see her hands were just undulating in the most beautiful manor, and then I became more aware of the fact: the motion of those hands was creating this sound.

"I think that's part of why I've always had this feeling of warmth and love in regard to music and security and family. I think it goes back in a way to that. But the thing I've always had about music is that for that moment in time you are totally lifted out of yourself whether you're writing or playing or performing or just listening to music.

"For that brief span of time all your problems, all your cares drop away. You're just immersed in that moment. It takes me somewhere. To me that's what music is all about in the beauty of it and when you doing it on stage – when you're in the zone and you feel that connection with the audience, there's a spiritual union that occurs, and that's what's significant about music."

"I really love this album. I don't normally enjoy listening to my own albums because they're predominantly me, but there are so many great artists here, and they're such a wide diversity. It's all blues, but the songs have their own individual personality to me. I dig myself. I love listening to it."

I told Edgar that I'd first met his brother at the1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival. He had been scheduled to play a huge three-day rock fest in Jackson, Michigan the same weekend in Goose Lake Park. That event attracted 200,000 people and featured Chicago, Rod Stewart, Bob Seger, John Sebastian and Jethro Tull. Johnny Winter snuck out on that event and showed up in Ann Arbor to see some of the artists who had inspired him.

I spoke to Johnny that day in Ann Arbor. He said he'd actually given up three gigs to be there. "But that's ok," he said. "I can play any time, but I can't come here. I came particularly to listen and not play and I really didn't want to play." The Ann Arbor Blues Festival was one of the first to feature almost all black artists. "It's just that I love the music, right? It doesn't make any difference whether you're black, white, poor or rich or whether you came from New York or Texas. It's just the feeling for the music. Just love it!"

Johnny spoke briefly about his brother Edgar that day: "He hasn't even got his group together yet, so it's going to be a while before he even thinks about recording."

Edgar hesitated a moment when I told him about my experience with his brother. "Yeah, he loved Ann Arbor. I remember him talking about it. It was a big deal to him."

Johnny ended up playing with Luther Allison on stage that weekend. "Yeah," says Edgar. "I would love to have seen that myself."

Edgar Winter's album "Brother Johnny" is released by Quarto Valley Records on April 15th. Further info: **edgarwinter.com**

Q&A with BRAVE RIVAL

Portsmouth-based five-piece rock, blues, and soul band Brave Rival featuring the lead vocals of Lindsey Bonnick and Chloe Josephine are introducing themselves to the world with their debut album 'Life's Machine'. The band kindly sat down with Blues Matters to give the lowdown to all of our readers:

by **Glenn Sargeant** Images: **Rob Blackham**

How did you all meet? Had any of you worked together before forming Brave Rival?

Donna Peters (Drums)
I met Chloe a long, long time ago. She was a friend of my sisters through college. Our paths had crossed over the years, but we'd never actually had a proper chat. But we knew of each other's talents as a singer and drummer. Eventually we got talking and started to write music together.

I play a bit of guitar but have never had the opportunity to write music with the right person. I had a collection of ideas that I'd had since I was 14 years-old and Chloe brought some of these to life. She also mentioned that her friend would love to come along to our next writing session. That friend was Lindsey. Chloe and Lindsey met when Chloe auditioned for a Motown function band that Lindsey was fronting in 2013. They then created their own covers harmony trio called Timeless which they still perform with today.

The three of us worked so well together and everything felt so natural. We felt like we had found the missing pieces to our creative lives. We became Patchwork Story, writing acoustic songs with myself on guitar. We performed at open mic nights and festivals but although I love playing guitar, I truly feel at home behind a drum kit, so we reached out to the guys and that is how Brave Rival came together.

Finding a collection of like-minded people to create music with was easy as I knew Billy would be perfect and when Ed joined us it just clicked. I think what we have is something special. Not only do we have such passion for music, writing and performing, we're good friends, too.

You have your debut album 'Life's Machine' scheduled for release in May 2022. How did you approach song writing for the record during lockdown?

Billy Dedman (Bass Guitar)
It was a strange situation. Before the lockdown we had already written songs that would have made it onto the album, as we had scheduled studio time for April 2020. With this session effectively cancelled due to the first lockdown we turned to technology to keep connected with each other. We would regularly share home recorded demos with each other via our shared google drive. Each of us would embellish with our own parts and we would discuss over zoom calls each week.

When the first lockdown eased in the summer of 2020, we decided to meet in person for the first time at the Mayfair studio, which is where we rehearse and record, but due to the rules about not meeting people indoors we set ourselves up outside in the sunshine for a summer jam. It was the first time we had played together in months, and it felt so good! Whilst the weather was good enough, we squeezed in a couple more outside rehearsals, and it allowed us time to polish up the songs we had been working on remotely. We repeated this process and began meeting indoors again when the rules allowed us to. The extra 15 months we had meant we had an abundance of songs to choose from for the album.

The first single is 'Guilty Love' which has this earworm catchy chorus. What was the inspiration for the song?

Chloe Josephine (Co-Lead Singer)
I often come up with melody or lyric ideas whilst either in the car or in the bath! I was just driving home, and Donna was meeting me at my house, and as soon as I got inside, I showed her the 'Guilty Love' idea. She immediately picked up a guitar and put exactly what I heard to it. She even roped in my husband to play the bass line she heard which Billy developed once we were able to jam it out in the studio. I even convinced Donna to sing harmonies at the time, much to her shyness, just because we were so excited about this song and wanted to hear it come to life immediately!

The inspiration is about an ex-boyfriend. In the car I was thinking about how happy I am in my life now and how different my life was just 3 years previous. My ex and I had gotten together in difficult circumstances, and our relationship was kind of always a bit doomed because we felt guilty being together - hence Guilty Love. So, it's a bit of a celebration of getting out of a relationship that just wasn't right - which I'm sure many people can relate to in some way.

The album is produced by Tarrant Shepherd who also engineered and mixed it. What was it like working with him and what did he bring to the making of the record?

Ed Clarke (lead guitarist)
Tarrant is one talented guy! We referred to him as a "wizard" during the album process; often preceded by an assortment of words that I won't repeat here. He has an incredible way of keeping you in the right frame of mind, whether it takes three attempts or thirty to get a part right!

He had some amazing insights not only into how the songs should be translated on to the record but also on the structures of songs. We have been working on these songs for far longer than we planned to before recording due to the pandemic, so we were quite attached to them. Sometimes we fought our corner about

how the songs should be arranged but, often, Tarrant was exactly right. One example is the first single from the album 'Guilty Love.' The original structure had another verse and pre chorus before the chorus came in as well as a bridge section that was not necessary. He was right to cut these out and streamline the song. Therefore, you need a great producer like Tarrant. They can see things that you can't because you're too emotionally invested in the musical baby that you've created!

The band has two lead vocalists Chloe Josephine and Lindsey Bonnick. Was that always the plan from the beginning or did that idea develop over time?

Lindsey Bonnick (Co-Lead Singer)
Chloe and I have been singing together for the past 9 years. We met in a Motown and soul function band before going our own way and forming our own act called Timeless. We became close friends from the start and knew we had something special vocally, so when I learned Chloe and Donna had started writing original music together in 2017, I knew I wanted a piece of that action! I hadn't turned my hand to writing before, so it was all a new experience for me, but there was an instant chemistry between us, and we knew we had to take it further. We started out at first with an acoustic folk inspired sound, with Donna on guitar and piano, but we knew we were feeling a much bigger sound. Brave Rival was formed about a year after, and we haven't looked back. Chloe and I have quite different voices, but they seem to complement each other in the best ways, and I just couldn't imagine BR without us both upfront, giving it everything. We have a unique writing, singing, and performing style which gives us our edge. Plus, we love each other to pieces. It just works :)

The opener 'Heart Attack' includes this lush Hammond Organ with a Pink Floyd-esque vibe running throughout. Who did you get to play Hammond on the record?

Lindsey Bonnick
We were incredibly honoured to have the skills of Jonny Henderson on a few of our songs. We just sent him the tracks and asked him to just add what he was feeling. We couldn't be happier with the results. We can't quite imagine some of the songs now without his beautiful handiwork. Jonny is a family friend and is well known for his work with Ian Siegal, Matt Schofield and Elles Bailey. One day you may see him play live with us. Watch this space.

Do you have any favoured guitars for recording and live shows?

Ed Clarke
Sally is my favourite guitar (and yes, most of my guitars have names). Sally is a Fender Special Run American Professional Stratocaster in an incredibly sexy Sapphire Blue colour. I fell in

love with it as soon as I saw it a few years ago and the simple fact is that if I can't play something on that guitar, I can't play it on any guitar. Something about it just feels right and it has that lovely Strat-y sound that you can't help but love. I would say that about 80% of the electric guitars on the album are Sally running through my favourite Victory Sheriff amp; usually with a Klon style overdrive and/or a clean boost.

'What's Your Name Again?' Is a real story with fluid slide guitar and filthy theme. Was that a difficult song to write?

Lindsey Bonnick
it was one of the easiest to write. Ed came up with the original slide riff and as soon as I heard it, the words came pouring out. "Early this morning, I opened my eyes, and lying beside me, much to my surprise, can't remember much of last night, what's your name again?" The theme was set, and the rest came very naturally, not that I was writing from experience of course! It's pure naughtiness and it's one of my absolute favourites to play live.

Interestingly, a Bravian Choir makes an appearance on a couple of tracks. Whose idea was this, who is in the choir, and did you select a specific place to record them?

Chloe Josephine
We knew we wanted a choir as soon as the album was being discussed and Lindsey and I were giddy at the prospect of it. Donna was aiming towards Hearts rendition of Stairway to Heaven! We have always visualised a choir on our track 'Long Time Coming' so we knew it was necessary - and it was a bonus having the choir feature on two more of our tracks 'Break Me'

and 'Come Down'.

We thought about finding an existing choir, but we really wanted to create our own 'bravian' choir based on the tones of the people we chose to be a part of it. Most of us are based in Portsmouth and we have lots of fantastic music connections on the music scene, so we were spoilt for choice!

We wanted a special place to record the choir that not only would look amazing for some behind the scenes footage but somewhere that would have a beautiful natural sound. We looked at a few different options, but we were slowly running out of funds because the choir was effectively a bonus feature on the album, but we were determined to make it work.

I had the brain wave of asking my brother, Matthew Dixon, an organist, who is associated with the magnificent St Mary's Church in Portsmouth. Matthew is currently running an organ restoration project through a huge national lottery funding scheme, which has been ongoing for 1 year. The church is encouraging people in the community to use its vast space for arts and music, so we managed to book an evening there to record the choir and the sound truly was spectacular. Do check out the project if you'd like to hear the sound first-hand.

Are there plans for live shows to support the release?

Billy Dedman
We have a bunch of shows booked already to support the release of Life's Machine. We plan to travel everywhere to spread the gospel of Brave Rival. We shall be playing headline shows through the summer, notably at the Echo Hotel Music Club again in June, which is where we recorded our live album. Hoping to throw in a few surprises to our live set along the way. We absolutely cannot wait to take this album out on the road!

Brave Rival's debut album "Life's Machine" is released May 6th via www.braverival.com

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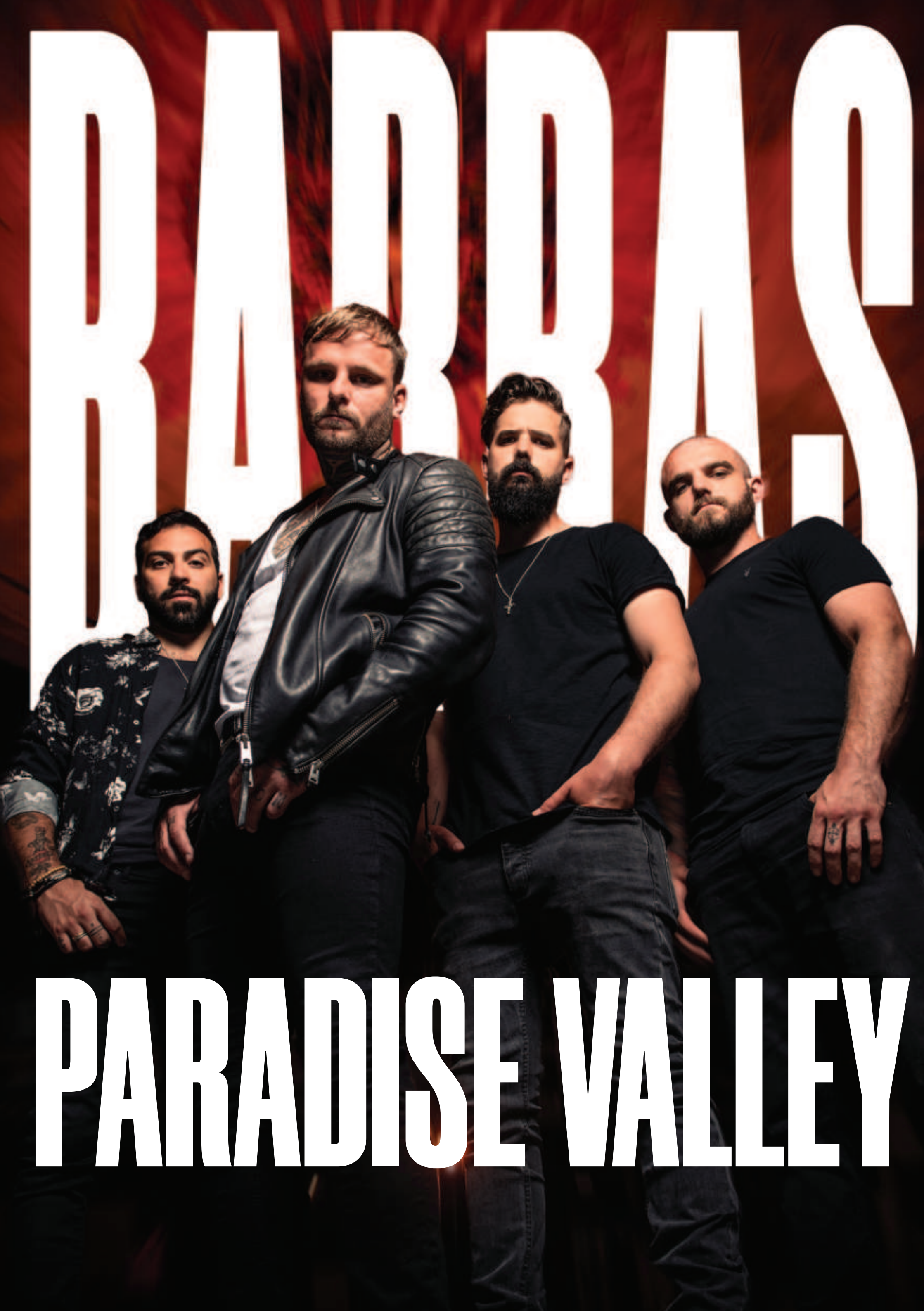
BARBAS
PARADISE VALLEY

Kris Barras has cultivated a cast-iron reputation as a significant blues musician over four prestige studio albums. As an off-the-road record, his fifth, Death Valley Paradise, takes more than a slight detour into a rockier terrain. Weapon graded uncaged banging blues-rock doesn't come anymore incendiary as Barras' heavy barrage on record and his live shows.

by **Paul Davies** Images: **John McMurtrie**

However, Death Valley Paradise takes things up a notch. Armed with a steely dual personality, he easily switches between a hard look that sends shivers of ice down the spine - his MMA face - and a broad, warming smile - his blues bonhomie facade - that instantly relaxes you in his charming company.

If he has anger issues then he vents them through his music with a focused determination that's commendable, in the least, judging by his friendly countenance as he explains his motivation behind this new addition to his growing discography: "Death Valley Paradise started off as the very first song I wrote when I started writing some heavier stuff. And it's too heavy and didn't really sit right; it was probably a bit too far into the metal world. But I really liked the title and the meaning behind it. That's why I chose it for the album's title." Continues Kris: "Death Valley is known as one of the most inhospitable places for man; it's super-hot in the day and then really cold in the desert at night. No living thing can survive out there. So, it's kinda like finding paradise and harmony in a situation where you're not meant to survive. I think with Covid and everything that happened with bands and musicians getting wiped away, I lost my job overnight, I found a way to survive and had to find a way of being happy in that scenario to survive. And that's where the album's title Death Valley Paradise came from."

There's a powerful knuckle of songs on this record with Dead Horses, Long Gone, My Parade, These Voices, Who Needs Enemies and Bury Me telling their own story. Barras' raspy vocal works well in articulating the heavy-duty emotions of these strong tunes giving him an outlet to release his darker side. Something which he is very proud about:

"I definitely think so. In my previous career as a fighter, that was the way I got all my anger and angst out. And then once I stopped fighting, I needed another outlet and that's the band. But I had a good few years where I was happy, and everything was going well. Marvin Hagler said that 'it's hard to get up and go running at 5 am when you're wearing silk pyjamas' and it's hard to get motivated for the fight when living a life of luxury. Things were pretty plain sailing for a few years for me and having some darker times thrown upon me, that I wasn't expecting, definitely gave me a new avenue to explore and unleash my emotions in music."

That's good to hear as Death Valley Paradise's eleven big and bullish songs are profoundly crafted by a soul in turmoil during the lockdown that screams 'hear me' loudly. It's the kind of record you can throw on and it'll bounce back on you and grab your ears in a headlock with demanding detail until you pleasingly 'tap out'. There is the distinct influence of Barras' guitar hero Gary Moore than, say, Elmore James on the heavy rock blues direction that this album investigates: "I grew up listening to blues stuff. And I'll say I kind of made my name as a blues-rock guy. I've always been on the fringe. I've never been a traditional blues guy and done the traditional blues thing as such," Barras recalls. "Growing up, I was into bluesy stuff, but I was a huge rock fan, and, in my teens, I was a proper Metal Head but all the stuff I was writing was more bluesy. When I started writing for this album, the first few songs that I wrote were heavy and I remember talking it over with

the band. So, then I was trying to write not so heavy and trying to fit into what people would expect from a blues-rock artist, and it just wasn't working, it wasn't natural. I spoke to my record label, and they were like 'we're cool for you to go heavier and to do your thing'. And the floodgates opened. You know, you have to have a certain type of sound and things have to conform to an unwritten set of rules to what is blues, and I felt as a musician there's a lot more to my capabilities than just the blues."

Delivering metallic-sounding guitar chords like a master blacksmith knows just where to strike on an anvil, Barras has rendered and honed an album of collaborative songs into a solid and shimmering rock form. Co-authoring songs with quality songwriters such as Jonny Andrews, Bob Marlette, Blair Daly and Zac Maloy is a new territory for Barras who explains how it all came about:

"There's a guy at the Mascot label group called Ron Berman. He's based out in New York. He runs the American side of the label. And he was the guy that discovered Nickelback for Roadrunner Records and was their A&R guy and brought them all the way through their career as he's a very knowledgeable guy in the industry," reveals Kris: "and we got chatting and he said, 'look, no pressure, if you want to have a go have a go I'll put you in touch with these people'. And it was brilliant. When you work with guys at that level, they're very good at steering, but not taking over, they respect the artist they work with including huge platinum selling artists. They know how to work with these guys. So, it was quite good. They weren't like, 'oh, yeah, don't do that'. They were keen to find out where I was coming from. They wanted to hear my ideas and it was a really good experience and I made very good friends out of it."

Throwing out guitar licks hotter than a rattlesnake's sting, Barras recently appeared as a special guest on Black Stone Cherry's UK tour, and he relished playing live again especially his first appearance at The Royal Albert Hall: "I absolutely loved it. Without live music I probably wouldn't bother", confesses Kris, "It's what I like doing. I like to tour and play to people and have the connection and share that. So, it's great to be back with 'Cherry and every show was pretty much sold out. It was just fantastic with great crowds well up for it."

Since fronting the Supersonic Blues Machine (with ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons) Kris' stock has risen considerably. The affirmation of his abilities and confident frontman style of presentation has given SBM and Barras a new lease of life. How on earth did this connection happen?

"We were originally put forward to be their support act for the Shepherd's Bush, London show," says Kris, "and we didn't know at the time that it wasn't common knowledge outside of the band that Lance Lopez, their previous frontman, was no longer with them and we got put forward to be their support act. Then there were conversations about 'oh, we need a new frontman' and my agent and record label said, 'what about Kris?' They watched some videos and then a phone conversation later I ended up flying out to LA to jam with them for a week."

Then things got real rock'n'roll as Kris explains: "The very first night we landed in LAX, Fabrizio, the producer and bass player that runs the band, said 'I understand if you're too tired, but Billy said that if you want to come round to his we can go out and get some drinks. If you're not too tired?'. So straight from LAX, the first time I'm in LA, I went up to Beverly Hills to Billy's house and I meet him, and we ended up going down into 'Sunset' to one of his favourite Mexican places and had some shots of tequila and got on well. And then that week we were jamming and rehearsing, and the rest is history!"

Just being around the legendary Billy Gibbons must have influenced some of the music, especially the 'crunch' guitar vibe, on this album? "Yeah, he's just an amazing person. He has so

much passion and love for music," enthuses Kris. "It always comes out when we're on a bus or on a plane and he says, "hey, Kris, heard of this guy?' and it would be like some random thing from the1950s; some really obscure blues thing. He really loves it and he vibes off that and we talked about the blues and guitars all day. He's got so much knowledge and is so passionate." Kris further reveals the bond he shares with Billy: "The one thing that I've taken away from working with him is when you're on tour sometimes, particularly with that band because we tend to just do like one or two shows in each country and fly somewhere else, sometimes we're literally leaving the stage then back to the hotel to shower and get our stuff then drive for several hours to an airport, get onto a plane to fly somewhere then have a quick nap in the afternoon, soundcheck, do other shows and you don't get the chance to sleep properly. And there was one time when we were all feeling it and Billy said, 'remember, we don't have to do it, we get to do it'. And that really stuck. That's from someone who's been touring for fifty years and there are times when you're tired and may be not feeling it," continues Kris: "The fact that even someone like Billy still sees it as a privilege to be able to do it and I think that's awesome. So, whenever I'm feeling a bit tired or maybe not quite feeling it on show day, I always remind myself that I don't have to do this, I get to do it and I think that's one of the best things Billy taught me."

Kris Barras has been 'getting to do it' ever since the release of his debut album Lucky 13 in 2016. Death Valley Paradise continues his unstoppable momentum.

krisbarrasband.com

THE BIG BLUES REVIEWS GUIDE

DOM MARTIN

A SAVAGE LIFE

Independent

Following on from his highly acclaimed debut Spain To Italy, Dom Martin has another stunning, evocative, passionate highly personal and stylistic release. Formed of ten tunes rooted in blues, with his unique brand of vocal delivery. Ably assisted by Dave Thompson on bass guitar and Laurence McKeown on drums, they are a formidable trio. All songs were one take tunes recorded in Belfast and Dublin. There is something here for any music lover. It is a multi-layered soundscape with Dom mixing acoustic and electric guitar driven tunes. This captures a rawness seldom seen in many other recordings nowadays. We kick off with Unsatisfied and the first chords pull you in, never letting go. It's a bluesy rocky feel with soaring guitar riff. Here Comes The River is a highlight, a heartbreaking song, lyrics dripping with emotion, atmospheric. Blues On The Bay is a road-tested favourite a tribute to a certain Irish Music Festival. The Man From Nowhere sounds authentic with adding a stylus crackle throughout, autobiographical in substance. On the track,12 Gauge; the band pulls no punches, it has ZZ Top tones mixing with a Celtic rock intonation. Echoes is a sublime song of loss and grief, beautiful vocals, and acoustic playing, a classic. Drink In Blue Colours adds a jazzy feel, Dom stretching every note. Addict makes the listener feel the storyteller's pain and reflections. Maxwell Shuffle is a quality instrumental full of influences of other guitarists including a nod to Hound Dog Taylor. Last track is a traditional Scottish lament, a poignant ending to an album dedicated to lost friendships.

COLIN CAMPBELL

ANDY SMYTHE

HARD TO BE HUMAN

DREAMING ELEMENT RECORDS

A singer-songwriter based in Greenwich, London, Andy Smythe has for the last twenty years quietly stolen the hearts and minds of all that hear his evocative, finely crafted songs. Andy's song writing has been influenced lyrically by the likes of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen but musically his biggest influences are the Beatles, orchestrated Baroque-pop and the Americana music of the Rick Rubin produced Johnny Cash records. As a live performer, Andy has played a huge variety of festivals and venues on the UK folk/acoustic scene and toured in the USA. Hard To Be Human is Andy Smythe's eighth studio album, written and recorded at home during the lockdown of 2021. Andy has a power tenor voice and is a classically trained pianist, he also plays acoustic and electric guitars, bass, harmonica, percussion, Organs and synthesisers on the album with Chris Payne playing violin, viola and cello. Andy plays all the instruments in a McCartney I type effort, fusing elements of rock, blues and folk, The collection of musical styles is perhaps reminiscent of The White Album. In 2020 while recovering from an unexpected emergency operation, Andy re-appraised his priorities in life in writing songs

"his fusion of styles is commendable and interesting"

such as Love's My Saviour, where Andy delivers a vulnerability to the vocals over the spiritual gospel tones of the organ on this poignant song. The title track Hard To Be Human, an acoustic blues with nice finger picking country tinged guitar and harmonica underpinning modern lyrics, with a good driving rhythm. Rosalita is a catchy radio friendly anthemic song, while the organ and drums lay down a back beat for Andy's soulful vocals on the melodic Man In Charge. The lockdown of 2021 led to a second period of productive writing and songs such as Car Wash Tuesday, Life Goes On and Praying For The Sunshine describes a variety of locked down experiences, Andy's pushing the barriers with his fusion of styles is commendable and interesting.

SHIRL

MIKE NAGODA

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Independent

Nagoda is a young Canadian who describes himself as a "queer and disabled blues and roots musician" and that theme informs most of his lyrics on the ten original tracks here. We open with He's My Man a blues-rocking upbeat shuffle that is indeed loud and proud and features Nagoda's fierce slide guitar plus wailing harp from Liam Ward. Kingdom Of Heaven is a heavy riffing rocker warning of a post-apocalyptic USA and features wah-wah guitar licks plus thunderous drums from Jeremy Ronson. Nagoda uses a technique known as double slide guitar which unusually involves using slides on two fingers. Nagoda's vocals would occasionally benefit from a rougher edged sound and looser, more relaxed approach and I think that will evolve naturally. P.R.I.D.E. borrows the speedy bass line from Wolf's classic Killing Floor and positively races along to the big finish. Here To Stay is a steady roller which is followed by Busker's Blues a slow number featuring tasty harp from Ward and a fine guitar solo from

> ***"Nagoda's guitar technique produces a strong, searing slide sound"***

Michael Keith. The pace slows for O, Maximus an interesting jazzy number telling a tale set in ancient Rome which features an extended instrumental outro. Nice one! Nagoda's guitar technique produces a strong, searing slide sound and those skills are evident throughout this promising album. Crumble And Fall is a country rocker which is followed by the Southern rock style title track Outside The Box telling the story of Nagoda's life journey and ending with the scream "I'm finally free". The mood changes with the lengthy Conquistador a funky Latin flavoured number reminiscent of the early Santana sound featuring tasty sax from Rex Ruber. This very personal album closes with We Got A Party which is an upbeat rocker celebrating queerness and diversity. This young man will develop further with regular gigging, and I look forward to hearing more in the future.

DAVE DRURY

70 YEARS OF THE SUN *SOUNDS*

THE R & B YEARS

KOKO-MOJO RECORDS

As the legendary Sun Records celebrates seventy years, I cannot help but remember going to see the entertaining musical Million Dollar Quartet with my father in London's West End. The record label Koko-Mojo has compiled a thirty-track collection with a particular focus upon artists who had singles issued on Sun, Flip and Philips International Records between the years 1953 through to 1963. Opener Bear Cat is one of two cuts by Rufus Thomas Jr who departed Cayce, Mississippi and made Memphis, Tennessee his home. A highlight is Little Junior's Blues Flames with the groovy Love My Baby (A song that would later be covered by Hayden Thompson with a then-unknown Jerry Lee Lewis on piano). Singer Freddie North also recorded as Freddie Carpenter and is singing the Ray Stevens penned Don't Make Me Cry with a gorgeous falsetto vocal. The inclusion of harmonica James Cotton will please Fifties blues enthusiasts with Hold Me In Your Arms and My Baby. This album is accompanied by detailed liner written by Dee Jay Mark Armstrong of Bühl, Germany and they really bring the material to life. The four Rosco Gordon tracks allow the listener to hear boogie, blues and rockabilly thus confirming the musical diversity of Sun Records. In conclusion, Samuel (Sam) Cornelius Phillips was a music visionary and when Sun Record Company began in February 1952 it allowed rhythm and blues to become more accessible to a wider audience. Whether you are an avid collector of Sun Records or just beginning your collection this record is a quality release.

GLENN SARGEANT

ADAM NORSWORTHY

INFINITE HOTEL

PARK HALL

Adam Norsworthy is a well-established singer, guitarist, songwriter and is a member of award-winning band The Mustangs and top 40 band The Milk Men. This is his fourth solo album, and it really is a very good one. He has written all the songs here and co-produced with Wayne Proctor (Proctor also mixed and mastered the album at House of Tone. The album is far from lightweight, dealing with love, mortality, the environment, our drive to fly outward from Earth and explore the galaxy, he even looks at the meaning of life! But this isn't any heavy-duty concept album or overblown Prog masterpiece: it has a slightly poppy feel, rhythm led (Wayne Proctor again with Oli Brown on bass). Bennett Holland adds spacious keyboards alongside Rich Young on piano. This could be an album from the 80's or nineties but it is also completely up to date and listenable as hell. It has touches of blues, rock even pop but Mr. Norsworthy is a songwriter at heart, and he creates songs that are easy to listen to but that grab the ear and don't let go. The overall quality here is top notch, every song has a place but the once started the album really deserves listening to all through. Really, a very good album.

ANDY SNIPPER

ALBERT CASTIGLIA

I GOT LOVE

GULF COAST RECORDS

Albert's new release was produced by fellow guitar shredder Mike Zito aided by Guy Hole. He is front man, vocalist, and consummate guitarist. The band comprises, Justine Tompkins on bass, Ephraim Lowell on drums and Lewis Stephens. Eleven songs with one cover, Melvin Taylor's Depression Blues, this release is in your face blues rock. From the opener I Got Love to last track Take My Name Out Of Your Mouth, this is a collection of blues infused tracks relating to his past two years of being a musician in the pandemic and associated emotions, whether that be on hard hitting tunes like Burning Bridges or the slower vibe to Sanctuary, he is wearing his heart on his sleeve. Double Down is punchy and full of rhythm, a cautionary tale. On, Long Haul Daddy the band shakes things up with a barrelhouse blues take with a catchy chorus made for an audience. What's Wrong With You slows pace slightly a great groove on this about a doomed relationship, cutting lyrics. Freedomland has a heavy bass line and sung with real anger and honesty, brilliant track. You Don't Know Hell has a Texas blues strut with a pleading message, punctuated with amazing guitar licks. Last song is, Take My Name Out Of Your Mouth is sublime, dirty blues full of slide guitar and a swagger, a very honest song Albert baring his soul with the lyrics. This is blues, raw and true with added power, a masterpiece.

COLIN CAMPBELL

ANGELA EASLEY

RISE

CLASS A RECORDS

The six tracks that form Rise are all a fine showcase for the award-winning talents of the singer, songwriter and pianist Angela Easley. With a sound that takes in gospel, blues, soul and jazz, and surrounding herself with a talented array of musicians the soundscape takes in floor-filling beats, emotive ballads, progressive rock backings, and atmospheres that range from the joyful to more pathos-filled songs, which foreground saxophones and lead guitar to great effect. The McCrary sisters add their gospel backing to the opener I Can Let Go, and the jazz-tinged Runnin' Out Of Time is a great showcase for the six-piece brass section that is employed on the song. The title track, Rise is a slow groove, with some brass chordal playing, blending funk and rock sounds, with a brooding, stately lead vocal. Don't Let The Devil Down has a progressive blues sound, with tremolo guitar and a minor chord tonality. One More Last Time is the slowest song, a ballad that is full of longing, an impression that is led by the minimalist saxophone and guitar parts, and Angela Easley's own piano playing. It is a song that is steeped in emotion, with plenty to reward repeated listening. The EP's closer Crazy Rain is another slow song with some fine slide guitar from Randy Peterson adding greatly to the song before the slow gospel chords build through to the song's emotional crescendo. Angela Easley's many and varied talents have already won her notice, and many awards, and hopefully Rise will take her passionate love for gospel, blues, soul,

PETER VETESKA & THE BLUES TRAIN

SO FAR SO GOOD

Blue Heart Records

I have been lucky enough to review the last couple of albums by Peter Veteska. So Far So Good certainly had my journalistic juices flowing from the first track. Done With Bad Luck, kicks off the album in such fine style. A thunderous drum intro leads straight into funk/blues with gusto. Vocally, and guitar-wise, Veteska is back with a bang. Immediately this album has got a vice-like grip on my ears. The Blues Train play their part so well as the backing band, tight and so well balanced. I Miss You So, introduces vocalist Jenny Barnes to the mix. She has an almost angel-like delivery with a touch of devilment about it. That, to me is a perfect combination when performing any blues tune. Jenny and Peter share the vocals So Far So Good delivers with every tune. It's relentless in its pursuit of the blues and how they should be played. Great lyrics, vocals, and a mean blues harp help to make this album an early contender for album of the year. You Give Me Nothing But The Blues, is there a better title of a song than that? allows Jenny Barnes once again to shine with her amazing vocals,

> *"relentless in its pursuit of the blues and how they should be played"*

combined with Peter Veteska, just oozes quality and craftsmanship. Baby Please has an up-tempo, jump, swing vibe that will have you out of your chair as soon as you hear it. It combines all these mini pockets of genres that are closely associated with blues and jazz twisting and turning every which way. I would dearly love to see the band perform this in a live setting. That actually can be said about all of the tracks on the album. The title track starts off lively and full of beans, slowing to a crawl to more of a 12-bar blues state of mind. Jeff Levine on the Hammond b3 is nothing short of magnificent. Can't We All Get Along concludes this wonderful album so sweetly. It reminded me of Gregory Porter and George Benson, or a mixture of the two in many ways. What a way to close an album.

STEPHEN HARRISON

rock and jazz to a much wider audience.

BEN MACNAIR

BEN REEL

LIVE AT JJ SMYTHS DUBLIN

B. REEL

Ben Reel is a singer, acoustic guitarist, rack harmonica player and here, leader of a very tight and versatile band. His music is difficult to categorise, except maybe to say that he makes it plainly obvious on this live set, recorded at the legendary Irish venue back in 2013, that he is no fan of "The X-Factor". That is apparent not only from his between song comments, but also from his own music, the opening track, Darkness & The Light, proves he has a penchant for funk, Heart Just Won't Heal rides a riff reminiscent of Chariots Of Fire, and Before Your Time reminds me of Americana pioneers' The Band, a simply beautiful performance. Mention of The Band leads me on to Bob Dylan, whose The Times They Are A Changin' is given a fine band treatment; so too is The Beatles' A Hard Day's Night, rendered extremely bluesily, and Our Fathers Sins is a powerful ballad, whilst the vocal on Who You Are sounds like a vintage Appalachian performance early on, before it builds a rather awesome head of steam. All Souls Alive is a strutting piece of bluesy rock and roll that also morphs into a reggae-tinged piece. A few lines at the end brought Memphis soul legend Al Green to mind, whilst other soul-flavoured tracks as the set draws to its close are the lovely Sweet Victory (nice falsetto) and Cosmic Shifting, with some fine wah-wah electric guitar playing by Mick McCarney. This Is The Movie closes out this thoroughly entertaining set by managing to seamlessly include just about every style mentioned so far!

NORMAN DARWEN

BIG LLOU JOHNSON

BIGMAN

GOLDENVOICE AUDIO

Where you gaun, big man? The number of times I heard that walking down the Gallowgate. A challenge, a call to arms. I'm guessing it has more favourable connotations over in the Americas where Big Llou Johnson has released his second album. But don't be fooled by the cover, for Big Llou is no wet behind the ears bairn. He's spent years touring with Phava, a four-piece gospel group, performing as a member of the Oak Park (Ill.) Concert Chorale and recording albums with Polish vocalist Dorota Jarema and Chicago folk icon Andrew Calhoun. That's when he's not doing voiceover work, radio shows, commercials and appearing in films and TV. He may have 26 more IMDB entries than me but I'm not jealous. Much. Back to the music and annoyingly, there are no writing credits anywhere to be found. Annoying, because some of them are so good, although the less said about Shucky Ducky (Quack Quack) the better. The title track has already been re-appropriated as my theme tune and will be played before I enter any room. Mr. Johnson is in the grand tradition of blues shouters like Wynonie Harris and Big Joe Turner, but the music has a funky feel to it which really works. Of course, if you've got a come to bed side to your vocals you could be singing anything, and people will be melting. I Got The Fever certainly lives up to its name and when the horns and backing vocals chime in across the record it's an absolute delight. In the main, the music has its roots in Chicago blues, but the late-night vibe engendered on tunes like Let's Misbehave gives things a rather splendid twist.

STUART A HAMILTON

SAM MOSS

BLUES APPROVED

SCHOOL KIDS RECORDS

Blues Approved is a great lost album from the talented singer, songwriter and guitarist Sam Moss. Recorded originally in the 1970s, the tracks on Blues Approved have gone through a thorough and stylistically appropriate remastering to show these tracks, that blend blues, jazz, soul, progressive rock sounds and pop to great effect. With originals from Sam Moss, as well as covers of songs made famous by such artists as The Monkees and The Rolling Stones this is an album that is full of musical gems. Moss's energetic vocals and guitar are caught superbly on the album with such songs as The Stones like To Those Still At Sea, root rocking opener Rooster Blood, the slow blues of King of My Hill, or the sixties Motown sound of Ain't That Peculiar, with its gospel handclaps, piano, backing vocals and harmonica adding to the great sonic texture of the song. Vida Blanche sounds like Free, with some fine brass section interjections. If You See My Baby is a gently swinging blues love song, with some fine bluesy harmonica and guitar. The brooding instrumental Nightlight Over Berlin is a study in both technique and atmosphere, with some more fine brass, and Moss's soaring virtuoso guitar playing over the top, sounding like David Gilmour, with its wide bends, and slow vibrato. The covers, which include Pleasant Valley Sunday, Act Naturally, an instrumental run-through of Can't Get Used to Losing You, and Who's Driving Your Plane? a lesser-known piece from Mick Jagger and Keith Richards add to the picture of Sam Moss's talent, a talent that should have been better known if the evidence provided on Blues Approved is anything to go by.

BEN MACNAIR

BOB WOLFMAN

TRIBUTE TO A FRIEND

INDEPENDENT

The release of Tribute To A Friend is the Jimi Hendrix inspired album Bob Wolfman has wanted to make for decades. Bob Wolfman's history goes back to his teenage days in New York City and his chance meeting with the man himself, Jimi Hendrix at Manny's music store. This release is the culmination of their friendship and Jimi's life-long influence on Bob, working with Jon Butcher, a well-known artist and noted producer. Wolfman recreates Hendrix's passion, sound and nuances while still managing to produce an album that interprets the songs rather than a straight tribute album. Wolfman along with Butcher have carefully chosen to interpret eight of Hendrix's lesser-known classics, with one cover and two originals making up this album. With Bob Wolfman on guitar and vocals, Jon Butcher on bass, guitar and backing vocals they are joined by top notch musicians Bruce Mattson on all keyboards, piano and Hammond B-3 organ, Barry Lit on drums and percussion, the bass men include

Mark Egan, Ron Belden and Wolf Ginandes. With high energy, fiery guitar and a driving foot tapping drum beat Gypsy Eyes opens the album in fine style. There are plenty of guitar riffs and a good bass line on Freedom. Castles Made Of Sand, is a wonderful slower number that evokes pure imagery. Dolly Dagger is a toe tapping groover with a touch of funk. more fiery guitar licks on the upbeat Spanish Castle Magic. Come On (Let The Good Times Roll) gets you up on the dance floor. The next two are original tracks with guest Sonny Landreth playing slide guitar, instrumental Parachute (Song For Jeffrey) has a wonderful breezy mellow vibe while Moon Candy is a Hendrix inspired rocker. The album closes with the enjoyable One Rainy Wish. the band have created a good tribute with an excellent choice of tracks that highlight the superb talent that was Jimi Hendrix.

SHIRL

BRANDON TESKEY

SCREAMING INTO THE VOID

INDEPENDENT

Although Brandon Teskey is probably best known for his roles as songwriter and guitarist in blues-rock band Until The Sun this is his second solo album. Recorded during June 2021 at Mind's Eye Studio in Glendale, Arizona Teskey was also on production duties enlisting Larry Elyea as engineer. The instrumental opener title track includes a Deep Purple-esque chug with Jon Nadel's bass. The hypnotic Vertigo On The Heights of Desire is a technical guitar masterclass whilst Brandon's textured vocals appear on When The Sun Goes Down. Blues aficionados will enjoy the swinging Freddie King number with Chris Tex (Until The Sun) providing the groovy drums. The beguiling voice of Alyssa Swartz blends well with Teskey's guitar on To Not Go Blind. The psychedelic electric guitar swirls on Hypnagogia with elements of Grunge thrown in for good measure. Closer Equinox is originally a John Coltrane tune with Teskey transporting the listener to somewhere like Ronnie Scott's in London as Danny Markovitch lays down a smooth saxophone solo followed by Will Kyriazis's slick keyboard. Overall, Brandon Teskey handles blues, jazz fusion and rock to create a diverse selection of songs that will appeal to a wide audience demographic. If you enjoy the likes of Joe Satriani and John Mclaughlin then press play.

GLENN SARGEANT

CHRIS FARLOWE AND THE THUNDERBIRDS

STORMY MONDAY & THE EAGLES FLY ON FRIDAY

REPERTOIRE RECORDS

This 3 CD set covers the entire career of Chris Farlowe from the early 60s. It is split between the singles, 1962-1966, Live At The BBC, and Live AT The Flamingo 1965. Air Travel is the first track on the first Cd, showing Chris Farlowe grinding through a 50s style rock and roll bop with brilliant backing vocals from sadly unknown singers. You can tell at this very early stage the amazing vocal talent that he has. Then we arrive at Stormy Monday Blues Part 1, originally written and recorded by T-Bone

BLIND RACCOON & NOLA BLUE

COLLECTION VOL. 4

Blue Heart Records

Being unfamiliar with Blind Raccoon's previous three volumes, this collection of 34 tracks was uncharted territory.

However, it's true blues territory with a roster of artists who may have passed you by – they were certainly mainly new names to me. I can't list everyone but there's some cracking modern blues here, such as Trudy Lynn's If Your Phone Don't Ring, and fascinating material such as Professor Louie and the Crowmatix Funky Steampunk Blues. Skylar Rogers' Firebreather is a great slow blues with a superb piano accompaniment plus some dramatic lyrics.

The blues is just as monumental on disk two with Kenny Parker's, She Might Meet Me, and then comes a real surprise. A couple of editions of BM ago I interviewed no other than Bill Shatner, aka Star trek's Captain Kirk, who at the age of 90 made a blues album, and managed to go into space courtesy of Jeff Bezos. Well, that was the blues not quite as we know it … because at a very active 96, here's Dick Van Dyke (cor blimey, Mary Poppins…) singing a spirited swinging version of an old standard, Is You is or Is You Ain't My Baby. Apparently the highly active Van Dyke made an album of bluesy material as recently as 2017 entitled Step Back in Time on Bixmix Records.

> ***"You love blues, so try Blind Raccoon. They have it all"***

That must be worth looking up. However, this sterling collection doesn't need to rely on novelty to convince you what an adventurous and inspiring outfit Blind Raccoon are. There's not a dud track in these 34 gems and they'd all sit well in a jukebox on Route 66. You love blues, so try Blind Raccoon. They have it all.

ROY BAINTON

Walker. Farlowe cuts his blues chops so eloquently here, wringing every bit of emotion out of the song. Stormy Monday Blues Part 2 is not just repetition, it's another chapter in the story. Reelin' And Rockin' sees Chris Farlowe team up with The Thunderbirds banging out this brilliant Chuck Berry composition. Farlowe's voice can go from blues to soul and rock'n'roll and all around the houses easily. This has long been the case for Chris Farlowe. It's the adaptability that impresses me the most. Farlowe has blues running through his veins which is so evident on the second Cd, Live At The BBC. Watcha Gonna Do Baby, is the first track and Albert Lee joins the fray, from a very early edition of Top Of The Pops. I somehow don't think the audience of this programme was expecting a full-on blues tune, but that's exactly what they got. Chris Farlowe's most notable song is perhaps Out Of Time, written by Jagger and Richards. It once again presents us with a slight shift in tone to what we have become accustomed to. Then we go back to the blues with a wonderful rendition of Baby What You Want Me To Do by Jimmy Reed. I'd forgotten just how good this song was. Live At The Flamingo carries on the Farlowe story in epic detail. This album is for everyone who loves the blues. At 80 years old we owe it to him.

STEPHEN HARRISON

DANNY BRADLEY

SMALL TALK SONGS

INDEPENDENT

Although it doesn't always work, sometimes you can predict the quality of a recording simply by the care and attention given to the package. Danny Bradley's first solo CD is a case in point. The impressionist-flavoured artwork of the sleeve by Declan Whitfield and the insert which includes the vocals all promised something special, and I wasn't disappointed. Impressive acoustic guitarist and vocalist Danny Bradley, born in the USA but living in Liverpool, has worked as a session man and this is his first solo outing on record. Just one man and a guitar, but in this case what a perfect combination. There are elements of Paul Simon here, especially with the poetic lyrics of the opening track, about an old man with a checkered past, If Ever He Blinks. The sheer sensitivity of his delivery and flowing guitar is mesmerizing. Then the blues kicks in with a gutsy rendition of Memphis Minnie's Kissing in the Dark. There's more blues with Willie Dixon's raunchy 29 Ways, and a pristine, clear delivery of the traditional Sittin' on Top of The World. But it's Bradley's immense talent as a songwriter which truly impresses. Lyricism of the first order shines through songs like Fire and Muse , Balcony Birds and Company Paper. He has a fine ear for the delivery of folk song, demonstrated here with the traditional Shady Grove. To be able to witness Danny Bradley in a folk club must be a sheer delight. These 13 well-recorded tracks reveal a talent we should all look out for and support.

ROY BAINTON

DOC LOU & THE ROOSTERS

BACK TO LOUISIANA

INDEPENDENT

Back to Louisiana, eh? I think you'll find that fifteen million US dollars heading

into the coffers of Napoleon Bonaparte took care of that. But if they mean musically, then the French trio have got a point on this, their second album, following up Crowing Blues from a couple of years back. There is certainly more than a hint of Cajun and Zydeco in their songs with Doc Lou (not a real doctor) blowing up a storm on his harmonica. Jeff Hug on guitar is a fine player while the percussion is courtesy of Michael Geronimo. Hopefully that's his real name because, if not, they're in for a world of trouble should they venture into the actual Louisiana. It's an enjoyable listen as they take a generally mid-paced stroll through music that nods to the likes of Professor Longhair and Lazy Lester but with a modern feel. There are a few good tunes in here, on an all-original set, with Rock Groove Shake the best of them closely followed by the slow, grungy blues of C'mon Hey Yeah. They rarely stray far from their chosen genre but when some surf guitar pops on In The Wood it makes you sit up and pay attention. The vocals aren't particularly memorable as the Doc has a fairly limited range, but the band certainly do a fine job of laying down a groove.

STUART A HAMILTON

DUSK BROTHERS

STORMS, RUM, LIARS & GUNS

INDEPENDENT

Gray and "E" Moncrieff comprise this two-man band from Bristol. Their new E.P. has only four tracks but what a punch they pack into each song. They must be seen live to appreciate how much detail they put into a set, using multi-instruments, including oil drums, cigar box guitars, they can make a tune out of anything. They use feet tambourines, car horn, fiddle, and harmonica also. Extraordinary swamp blues they describe their own music style as, call it what you like, these tunes leave the listeners' ears melting to the toxicity of the beat, delivery, and drawl of the vocals. Hold On is the first tune, a real foot stomper with fine vocal harmonies and a grinding beat. The Damage Done continues the powerful vocal harmonies and has driving harmonica building to a musical crescendo. Rum River is full of infectious rhythm. A synthesis of tone and melody this has a style of its own, very organic, cue tambourine for a driving beat, and it has a catchy chorus, a crowd favourite. I Go It Alone is a dreamy slow ballad, no less gritty in interpretation and delivery, there are harmonious slide guitar tones at the bridge of the song. A tune to savour, short sharp and to the point, adding to a full-on sound. Very hard to hear who is playing all the instruments as they melt into one on all tracks. Hard hitting bluesy toned tunes, turn the volume up and enjoy.

COLIN CAMPBELL

FRAN MCGILLIVRAY BAND

RAIN

JOKA RECORDS

Dependably good stuff from under-rated British folk and blues veteran McGillivray and friends. Rain features 13 original songs, with production deliberately designed to emphasise quality song writing in a late-night style, with intelligent lyrics centring on relationship themes and sometimes venturing into social commentary. The musical corollary is that this

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Brave Rival

LIFE'S MACHINE

Independent

If the worlds of blues/blues rock is to have a continuing growth it needs new artists and bands to create fresh material whilst encouraging their fanbase to explore the genre's history. Enter Portsmouth-based five-piece Brave Rival with their debut album Life's Machine. Enlisting the talents of producer and engineer Tarrant Shepherd for his first professional album under his own stewardship, Brave Rival worked on the songs through Zoom calls with bassist Billy Dedman and drummer Donna Peters recording their parts at home. Opener Heart Attack kicks things off with a lush Hammond Organ from Johnny Henderson as Pink Floyd fans might be intrigued by the middle 8 in the track. The first single Guilty Love has a real catchy chorus which has real potential to become a favourite on radio and is then followed by the haunting Without You as lead vocalists Chloe Josephine and Lindsey Bonnick create such magical harmonies much like their comtempories Fleetwood Mac and Ward Thomas

"Brave Rival is definitely one to watch"

amongst others. I especially love the high-energy drumming that Donna Peters brings to the material as it is impactful without drowning out the other components of the tracks such as Run and Hide. What's Your Name Again? allows guitarist Ed Clarke to release this heavy slide guitar whilst Fool For You takes the listener to church with moments of Gospel. Break Me is an emotional tale told from the perspective of two women entangled in a love tri-angle as it slowly builds. The band hand-picked the Bravian Choir and recorded them at St Mary's Church in Portsmouth capturing incredibly mov-ing vocals. A real highlight for me. Overall, Life's Machine is an exciting album complete with rich vocal harmonies, fluid blues-rock guitar and a collection of well-produced songs bolstered by a powerful rhythm section. Brave Rival is definitely one to watch.

GLENN SARGEANT

is a shredding-free zone; the guitar work barely breaks into overdrive and usually tends towards the jazzy, and the drums eschew that big beat for persistent understatement. The opener, The Flood, is a minor key warning about the dangers of climate change that incorporates shades of country, which I gather has had some airplay on country radio shows. I Play By The Rules is written from the standpoint of a constant and committed lover, in love with someone who doesn't feel quite the same way. Jump Back sees the band get its groove on, while Dressed To Kill is a reminder that it's not just teenagers who like to dress to impress and go out partying on the weekend. Teach Me Everything You Know is unmistakeably an age-appropriate expression of carnal desire, and funk-tinged 12 bar The Struggle takes a tilt at greedy so and so's everywhere. I Want To Hear You Sing lifts a classic country-blues chord progression to good effect. This one is obviously on the more laid-back side of the blues spectrum, which will help it find listeners outside purist circles. And deservedly so.

DAVID OSLER

GARTH HUDSON PRESENTS

A CANADIAN CELEBRATION OF THE BAND

CURVE

You might imagine that writing a review of an album like this would be a piece of cake. Well that is absolutely not the case. This collection of songs by the Band, selected by the group's keyboard player,

performed by a host of Canadian acts will hold, for many people, their own particular associations. With a true iconic group the justified, oft overused epithet legendary, imbues a certain don't criticise element when writing. Luckily I have no problems here as all twenty tracks have been treated with the utmost respect. To be honest I had not come across many of these individual acts before. It goes without saying of course that there are obvious exceptions to that in the form of Bruce Cockburn, Cowboy Junkies and Blue Rodeo. However it was a real aural treat to discover the joys of, for example, Peter Katz & The Curious and their beautiful interpretation of Acadian Driftwood. I can't think if I have heard a better version of This Wheels On Fire than displayed here by Neil Young & The Sadies. It is just brilliant. Sparks flying off in every direction and sets the collection such a high bar that it could have been a bit of a let down subsequently. Never fear though as there is almost an embarrassment of riches. You want blues then listen to Chantal Kreviazuk on Tears Of Rage. Perhaps you prefer your music with a touch more soul, then seek out her husband Raine Maida on The Moon Struck One. So many treats, and so few allowed words. Simply buy this album, as it won't likely be bettered this year. A justified 10th anniversary re-release, whilst in no way comprehensive, is a damn fine introduction.

GRAEME SCOTT

GEORGE THEODOROU

WATER

USP MEDIA

Singer, guitarist and songwriter George Theodorou is from Athens in Greece and began his own solo career in 2021, after touring internationally with a variety of bands. He is known in some circles as "The Voice Of Rock", and on this evidence that's not too inaccurate, as some of his material is very much in an 80s rock style, influenced by the likes of Bon Jovi, among others, and he has a flair for a big-sounding rock ballad. Now, I am aware that some blues lovers really go for this kind of material, but let's look for the bluesier material among the bombast. And it is there, just lend an ear to the guitar break on High As A Mountain which is very much in a classic Jimi Hendrix style, even if the song itself isn't, but it fits perfectly. Then there is also Rock N Rolla which is a strutting, contemporary rock reimagining of the 50s style, with a strong blues influence as you might expect. There is a real edge to George's singing here that really suits this good-timing track, a fine guitar break and a genuine rocking feel and sound that hits the spot. Many of the other tracks are out-and-out rock, though there are elements of pop and even country, but I must mention Woman's Insane. This is a throbbing rock number more than a little like UK blues-rockers Free in sound, that's certainly a recommendation, and I guess if you like what you've read here, then do investigate.

NORMAN DARWEN

HARLEM LAKE

A FOOL'S PARADISE VOLUME 1

INDEPENDENT

Sometimes you just need to hear a few chords of a song and you just know you are on a winner; this is definitely the case about Dutch band Harlem Lake's new release. Ten songs and no fillers, this is a blues

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HUGHES TAYLOR
"MODERN NOSTALGIA"

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THE TERRAPLANES BLUES BAND
"STEPPING STONES"

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EMMA WILSON

WISH HER WELL

Independent

After her performance at the 2022 Rock and Blues Festival in Skegness, where Emma presented her new material, the latest album is now out. Entitled Wish Her Well, it's a collection of 10 original songs, penned by Emma and her bass player Mark Neary. Adam Chetwood is on guitar; Mat Hector is on drums and Alessandro Brunetta makes an appearance on harmonica. The opening track is a stripped back version of the title track Wish Her Well, which gives full reign to Emma's luscious vocals. There's more than a hint of bluesy humour in the lyrics, which are aimed squarely at the woman who stole a loved one away. Mary Lou is in a funkier style and again shows Emma's vocals, which come across with beautiful clarity, but at no point seem forced as the Boro's blues singer demonstrates her impressive range. Little Love Bite is a slower number, which steadily builds up the intensity, with some haunting background vocals. Rack Em Up is a low down and dirty ballad, with a pool-based theme and some great funky guitar work to accompany Emma's soul-

"lovely offering from the very talented Emma Wilson"

ful invitation to play the game. Blossom Like Snow is a sad song, hidden in an upbeat tune with a staccato sort of beat. She Isn't You, heads off down a soul path, towards an area where Emma is completely at home, sounding very much like one of her idols, Ann Peebles. Not Paying is a real rocky number, which Emma performs with gusto and humour, also seems to be a menacing song directed at an ex and the third party concerned. (I think she gets her message across quite clearly on this one.) Nuthin' I Won't Do, is a sleek number, which races along at a great pace, but yet again Emma maintains the smooth clarity in her delivery. Back On The Road has a jazzy feel to it and gives a personal insight to a musician's life on the road. Then I'm Gone, wraps up the album and is a bittersweet song about parting and it makes a fitting closing final track to this lovely offering from the very talented Emma Wilson.

STEVE BANKS

drenched tonic for the senses. They are a five-piece band; Janne Timmer is the lead chanteuse with vocal range defying others in the same category. With a rhythm section of Benjamin Torbijyn and bass guitarist Kjelt Ostendorf, they are underpinned by heavy guitar licks from Sonny Ray and keyboards from Dave Warmerdam the band's founder. Deaf And Blind opens the blues floodgates hard punctuated vocals soar over interplay with rhythm section. A Fool's Paradise slows the tempo, the sonics rise and fall on this, sublime vocals throughout. The River cranks a sliding swampy beat with backing horns, a joy. Guide Me Home is a lilting ballad another slow tempo tune. Please Watch My Bag is a sultry steady blues tune delivered with style. My Turn To Learn is an anthemic slow burner, simple but effective arrangement. I Won't Complain is a slow meandering tune with shared vocals, a rootsy feel with added keyboards. I Wish I Could Go Running is full of punchy vibes and sultry vocals, great tune with a great groove. On this copy the added tracks were live versions of Guide Me Home and the title track, exhibiting a contrast. Cannot commend this album enough, captivating!

COLIN CAMPBELL

HARLEY KIMBRO LEWIS

SELF-TITLED

HKL

Martin Harley, Sam Lewis and Daniel Kimbro collaborate for the first time on this laid-back album reminiscent of an early American songbook of an album. Having worked with some of the biggest names in the business this is acoustic Americana at its finest. The story behind these guys is nothing short of fascinating and no doubt had a massive influence on their confidence with what they do. Harley participating in the 'World's Highest Gig' in the Himalayas no less. Kimbro double Grammy-nominated and Lewis with a wealth of experience touring his music around the world, these guys are established and accomplished musicians and song writers who together have created this piece of magic. With a tour of this music hitting the UK from March this year, buy this album and then book your seats. If easy listening, great stories and an old school, home spun feel to your music is what you love then this bunch of lads with the easy banter and uncomplicated message will be right up your street.11 tracks that deliver an uncomplicated, paired back, relaxed and soulful vibe, you'll be hooked.

Jean Knappitt

JOSE BELLO

RESILIENCE

MELTS IN YOUR EAR'S STUDIO

I'll be the first to admit when I saw the word accordion, I wasn't holding out much hope, mostly because it reminds me of seeing Eastern European guys on the underground whilst I go to work but how wrong could I be. Firstly, let's talk about Josies voice, from the off it's nice, soft, calm like your favourite schoolteacher and she eases us into her album very smoothly with Rising, which feels like a protest song but without the shouting, bringing up such subjects as inequality, race hate, poverty and intolerance but in an educated calm debated way which makes me think that a lot more musicians should be in politics and

maybe the world would be a better place. Resilience is the third studio album from this New York based singer songwriter and the nine tracks are well balanced skipping from light hearted to folky protest songs and the musicians backing her are very much on board, one of them being Mike Nugent on guitars. The Sound Of Guitars is a lovely sounding track that completely soothed my soul and takes me away to better times which is ironic as it's followed by, I Am Empty about being in lockdown and we can all relate to those days of sadness and bad news, which seemed to get worse every day! Love That's Real is the first song that I hear an accordion on, it's nothing like I've heard before and with a two-step Texas bounce that celebrates love of people whomever they are. everybody should be loved; music is the best form of sharing in my opinion. By the sixth song Killing Time, I'm enrolled in the story as this is very much a part of my own life, about raising my kids and times having them moved out, luckily, I've got reviews to write. Coffee Shop Open Mic is more an American version of our own open mic nights except over here in the UK we hold ours in pubs, but the sentiments are the same. With Calling card and Too Many changes rounding off the very easy to listen to and pleasant album.

BARRY BLUESBARN HOPWOOD

KATHY MURRAY & THE KILOWATTS

FULLY CHARGED

BLUE HEART RECORDS

In Austin, Texas, Kathy Murray is already a legend as both a songwriter and performer. These fourteen tracks will tell you why. The album opens with a highly infectious Texas double shuffle Expense of Love. Kathy has a pleasing, clear vocal style and the lyrics on these fine songs come across crisp, direct and clear. Bill 'Monster' Jones handles the guitar duties with fiery efficiency. The stand-out track, The House That Freddie Built, is devoted to the late, great Freddie King, and it's a five-minute informative homage to a man who certainly was, as the lyric goes, 'larger than life'. You can't beat a good horn section on a blues album, and this one has the fine brassy insistence of The Texas Horns, Kaz Kazanoff, John Mills and Art Gomez. There's a satisfying rendition of the old Tampa Red classic, It Hurts Me Too. Bill 'Monster' Jones also makes a vocal entrance on four tracks, especially effective on the sexy Extra Nice. All the compressed cultural quality we've come to expect from Texas music is encapsulated here. There's a stirring mix of Zydeco, soul and rockabilly and two tracks make this album a worthwhile buy, the snazzy guitar picking on the funky Henny Penny Blues and Matt Farrell's storming barrelhouse piano on Get a Hold of Yourself. If you're looking for a party, get some beer in the fridge, check the Covid regulations and crank up the Kilowatts full volume. Kathy and the Kilowatts truly are 'fully charged'.

ROY BAINTON

KATIE HENRY

ON MY WAY

RUF RECORDS

The singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Katie Henry shows her considerable talents on the ten tracks that make up the suitably titled On My Way, her second album. With a sound that draws influence from the rhythms of John Lee Hooker, and any number of vintage players, a knowing bluesy holler to her voice, and a tight and inventive band the album grabs the listener from the first song. Opening with the title track, On My Way is a clarion call, with some fine rhythms, punky chords, and a solo that comes in loudly and with one eye on the jugular. This is not music for a sedate social gathering. With her piano playing to the fore, Empty Cup has a swing and swagger to

HUGHES TAYLOR

MODERN NOSTALGIA

Independent

I find it fascinating how blues music has both developed and mutated so extremely over the last 50-60 years, yet a musician such as Hughes Taylor can present his own form and reference every stage of that mutative effort. Hailing from Macon Georgia, Taylor plays electric guitar Blues that would be immediately familiar to followers of Clapton or Stevie Ray Vaughan but also feeds elements of the stalwarts like Roy Buchanan or soul players like Peter Green. While his voice is really no more than ok, he is a talented axe man and not too shabby a songwriter. At times he really does bring back memories of all the greats but there is still something in his playing that

"It's an excellent album, a wide range of styles and shapes"

sets him aside from the thousands of other pickers and strummers. Dreamily has a delightful drift to it, his guitar strummed through the verses while his solo positively screams out of the mix. Quarantine Blues has his foot down hard on the Wah pedal while Highwayman burns with some real power and punch. There is a real groove about Prettiest Thief, the Hammond bringing up the size of the soundscape and his guitar lines are really fluid and dexterous. I get the feeling that these are songs that could easily stretch out in a live environment and, with Macon as a base, I would have though that they would be a wicked jamming band. It's an excellent album, a wide range of styles and shapes, and well worth checking out.

ANDY SNIPPER

MARIO ROSSI BAND

HEAVY

MRN Productions

Mario Rossi hails from Brazil and this is his third album which Mario suggests is pitched between the sounds of John Mayall's Blues Breakers and the first incarnation of Black Sabbath, which on reflection is about right as there are blues influences across the seven tracks, which probably sit more comfortably under the Classic Rock label. The album gets off to a cracking start with the track Nemesis, which is a powerful song with some blistering guitar from Mario's Gibson SG and thumping bass. The vocals are not unlike Rory Gallagher's but do not get misled here by the Album's title "Heavy", this is blues rock at its best and does not veer thankfully into Heavy Metal. To prove the point Mario switches to a more melodic style on the blues laden That Letter which pitches him back to the 1960's Fleetwood Mac sound with Peter Green at the helm. The Mario Rossi "band" title is slightly misleading as besides writing all the material Mario plays lead guitar, bass guitar, handles all the vocals and has produced the album. He does have some support with bass and

"An unknown artist to me prior to this review but one I will certainly be following in the future"

keyboards on a couple of tracks but drummer Rafael Caravallo is the only constant. Throughout the album Mario demonstrates what a capable vocalist he is, particularly on the punchier material, link this with his superb guitar tone then you soon realise that he is virtually the full package when it comes to Blues Rock criteria, he also has plenty of versatility as he generates some Boogie on Raw 'N' Rough Boogie and has some psychedelic Hendrix moments on Acid/Chemistry songs. An unknown artist to me prior to this review but one I will certainly be following in the future.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

it, and Without A Fight is drenched in feel good keyboard, a toe-tapping beat and slide guitar. Bury You has a rootsy guitar riff, with a vocal that is full of grit. Setting Sun is a slower, poppier piece, with an attractive vocal performance, and Got Me Good has the energy and drive of early Fleetwood Mac, with its rolling keyboard and stacked harmony vocals. The Harmonica player Giles Robson features on Too Long, his telling playing adding to the groove that the band provides. The album closer, Catch Me If You Can has a keening slide guitar and a higher pitch to the vocal. Comparisons are easy to make, with names such as Fleetwood Mac, KT Tunstall and Amy McDonald having sonically similar voices and song writing styles, but Katie Henry has much promise, as what is only her second album more than ably demonstrates.

BEN MACNAIR

KEVIN GREENWOOD

SHE KNOCKS ME OUT

INDEPENDENT

There's no shortage of guys who reach retirement age and decide finally to cut the blues album they wish they'd made 50 years ago, financing the exercise from their own pocket. What makes 72-year-old Kevin Greenwood's She Knocks Me Out stand out from myriad similar albums is the clever lyrics and the top-notch calibre of the musicians this former businessman roped in for the proceedings. The names mentioned on the album sleeve mean nothing to me and probably won't mean much to anyone in the UK, but the accompanying press release identifies them as 'a list of Bay Area All-Stars'. Even on the first listen, it's evidently that that's not idle boasting. I guess Greenwood himself wouldn't claim to be the world's strongest vocalist, but his sharp harmonica work cranks up the blues quotient in all the right places. What you get if you track this one down is 15 Greenwood-penned originals, mainly in a late 1940s R&B and West Coast swing mould. I especially liked Two Many Men's, a shuffle that tells the cautionary tale of a girlfriend who's getting more than enough away games, with a suitably sleazy piano break. Two Too Good amusingly relates what happens when you bring two sisters back to your apartment and one 'sure knows how to love' and the other's a prude. If you're a fan of the likes of Louis Jordan and T-Bone Walker, this one is worthy of your investigation.

DAVID OSLER

KRISTIAN MONTGOMERY & THE WINTERKILL BAND

PRINCE OF POVERTY

INDEPENDENT

Boston based band's second album opens with thunderous drums, swirling guitars and snarling vocals as Montgomery proclaims They'll Remember My Name. Great start, great sound. Next up is Tired Of Being Tired which aptly features a much softer, more acoustic, relaxed approach with the vocals signifying resigned exhaustion. The country rocker Working Hands features the usual guitar, bass and drums but is propelled by, horrors, a banjo. It's great. The tempo and mood drop for country ballad Warm Grave which

IMAGE: JIM HEAL

features lap-steel guitar and pensive vocals, and it is indeed "all we leave behind". The catchy Don't Call Me Baby has an energetic, almost rockabilly feel as Montgomery tells of love gone wrong. Sophomore albums are notoriously difficult, but this fine band cover all the bases here, rock, blues, alt-country, soulful ballads and have produced a winner. Soul For a Soul is a gentle and thoughtful love song but That Kind of Love is a mid-tempo blues rocker. Swaggering vocals and an insistent riff feature defiantly in I'll Find My Way Home as Montgomery asks for forgiveness but stands his ground. The banjo and lap-steel make another appearance on the lively American Fire a rabble-rousing comment on America's recent political direction. The album closes on a more optimistic upbeat note with Just Driving Around a country shuffle with the singer happily reminiscing "I've got it figured out because I met a girl who's happy just driving around". The material here is rootsy, sometimes raw, occasionally nostalgic and I get the feeling there's more to come. I look forward to hearing it in the future.

DAVE DRURY

LOWELL FULSON

LIVE! WITH JEFF DALE & THE BLUE WAVE BAND

PRO SHO BIDNESS

This recording is a live one made in 1983 at a small venue called Club 88 in Los Angeles where Lowell was being supported by Guitarist Jeff Dale and his band. The sound quality is fairly raw, but it is an historic recording of Lowell performing a full set during his later, years ably supported by an enthusiastic bunch of musicians which included Pee Wee Clayton's grandson Marshall Crayton on Tenor sax. Lowell Fulson wrote and recorded one of the key blues standards songs of the 1950's era called Reconsider Baby. It is good to see that this song is performed on the album and is a great slow blues with a crunching guitar intro. Most of the other songs have been written by Lowell which include Blue Pain, Do you Feel It, and Lowell's Lollipop, all follow what is classified as West Coast Blues, a more soulful sound compared to Chicago Blues. While Lowell had an excellent feel for the blues, he was not a particularly strong vocalist or guitar player, so he was always best heard in a band framework, and this is what this release offers. He is supported by seven musicians including two guitarists and three saxophone players who set the groove, particularly on the final track Going To Chicago which has a much heavier feel to it. The original recordings were made on a four track Tascam Portastudio system and do suffer from some tape noise which does make the reproduction a bit "messy" in places, but this should not detract from what is a good live recording by one of the key blues artists who was prominent during the 1950's.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

MISTY BLUES

ONE LOUDER

Lunaria Records

The eleven songs that make up One Louder draw on the blues, rock and soul to good effect. With many guest musicians, such as Joe Louis Walker, Big Lou Johnson, and Justin Johnson, the songs are all by singer-songwriter Gina Coleman who manages to draw some fine performances out of the many musicians that feature on One Louder. With a rhythm section of drums, bass, keyboards and guitar, various brass and woodwind players, and harmony and backing vocalists, there is a lot to listen to. The gospel opener A Long Hard Way serves as a notice of intent, but it is the second track Freight Car, with Justin Johnson's lead guitar and trumpet from Bill Patriquin and saxophonist Aaron Dean playing against Gina Coleman's strident vocals, that is an early highlight of the album. The tricky middle section, adding some jazz interplay adds to the pedigree of the musicianship that is on display. This Life We Live has an insistent guitar part harmonised by the sax and trumpet with some of John Lee Hooker's swagger to the sound. Birch Tree is a slower song, with chordal slide guitar and muted trumpet adding to the atmosphere of the story within the song. Leave My Home is a funky piece with stabbing guitar parts, and the closing track Take a Long Ride has some fine guitar soloing from Joe Louis Walker, and a slightly more brooding atmosphere than any of the other songs on One Louder. Misty Blues were established in 1999, and the quality of musicianship on display here pays testament to how good a band can get, given the time to gel properly.

BEN MACNAIR

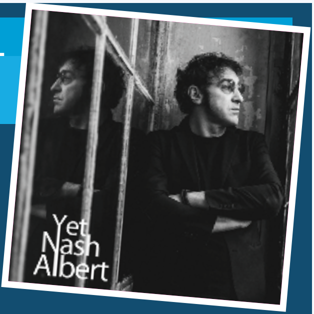
LUTHER 'GUITAR JUNIOR' JOHNSON

ONCE IN A BLUE MOON

CROSSROADS BLUES MEDIA

Born and raised in the Mississippi Delta, Luther has a superb blues pedigree having played in the Muddy Waters Band for over a decade. Prior to this in the 1960's he was a member of Magic Sam's band. These experiences have allowed Luther to attain a rich vein of Chicago Blues and now into his 80's he shows no sign of slowing down as listening to this live album will highlight. The album was recorded in St Petersburg on the 31st of October 2020 with his full band The Magic Rockers and includes a mix of original and cover songs. While three of the songs are over twelve minutes in length the music never gets monotonous as Luther intersperses the songs with some subtle guitar breaks and antidotes on the blues, perfectly highlighted on his song Stealing Chickens. This song is the standout as the musicians all get the chance to flex their muscles with Paul Nadeau and Otis Doncaster taking the honours on keyboards and harmonica respectively. Luther has a very laidback but warm authentic vocal style that makes him very easy on the ear. He is aided by a studio quality recording sound that on a slightly negative point has

NASH ALBERT
...YET



Independent

Nash Albert has a history a mile long and it all feels as though it has found its way into this album. He was born in Georgia, at that time in the USSR, and brought up listening to Georgian folk music. He then discovered rock & roll (as so many citizens of the USSR did) and even at the age of 6 saw the freedom and protest as a weapon against the state. Eventually, after Perestroika, he formed a band Salamandra and headed off to the US, finding himself back in Moscow in 1996 at the height of gangsterism and the explosive Russian underground culture and forming a new band Blast which was very popular in the Moscow clubs. Now he comes back to the UK and Blast played the festival circuits in Europe and South Africa. Through all of this, his music has developed, picking up influences from everywhere and with ...YET, his second solo album, it all seems to coalesce, and the album comes over as a totally individual and very passionate statement by a guy whose credentials are wide-ranging and honest. From the opening track Kill The Fear he seems to

"it is not confused or unnecessarily complex, it really is a great album"

be in a Germanic, almost Rammstein – metal mood but swiftly tempers that with a strong and melodic vocal passage. He is really setting out a stall to make the listener unsure of what he is all about. It is very strong but also made me listen closely to the song as he tore it from side to side. Betting On My Fate has a distinctly European feel to it, I was hearing elements of Henry Padovani and Al Stewart as Albert's soft, yet impassioned vocal carried the song. From that point on, I was entranced. There are tracks with the feel of mid-sixties Dylan, others that have a Hawkwind influence, choruses that feel like Gregorian chants, so many parts and pieces. But, and a big but, it is not confused or unnecessarily complex, it really is a great album but not really what you would call mainstream.

ANDY SNIPPER

cut out all the background crowd noise, for a live recording it is often essential to hear this to capture the atmosphere. A very entertaining execution of original Chicago Blues music played by one of the true masters of the genre, ably supported by a talented group of musicians who allow the master centre stage but do buzz in as required. The final track Mean Old World plays like the encore song with all band members getting their opportunity to solo.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

MEAN OLD FIREMAN & THE CRUEL ENGINEERS
DUMPSTER FIRE

INDEPENDENT

There are terrible band names and then there is Mean Old Fireman & The Cruel Engineers. I mean what's wrong with The Iron Overalls. An in-joke for Charlie McCoy fans there. But at least he's an actual ex firefighter. The Mean Old Fireman in question is Ned Bolle who certainly knows his way around the music shop as he sings, plays slide guitar, banjo, mandolin, guitar, bass and percussion across the songs. I say sings but he's got one of those voices for which the phrase lived in was invented. So, you're really going to have to like Captain Beefheart gravel in your grits to enjoy this one. It also explains why his previous record was all instrumental. There's another ten or so musicians chipping in, but this really does appear to be the Ned Bolle show. However, the music is uniformly good with some interesting arrangements, especially when the horns arrive and drop some jazz in your ear. McArthur's Cunning Ruger is the best example of that and probably my favourite tune on the album. Especially if you read the story behind it! Of the covers I'm torn between the New Orleans take on Barefootin' and the downright nasty version of Stack O' Lee. Thirty-nine seconds into this album and I was already thinking it's not for me. Thirty-nine minutes later I was hitting repeat. An unexpected surprise.

STUART A HAMILTON

OLE ASK
IT'S BEEN A WHILE

ROLLER RECORDS

Americana from a Norwegian, anybody? Well, yes. The tenth album from singer-songwriter Ask is quite the unexpected bluesy/southern rockish/Springsteenesque treat. As you'll quickly get from that description, we're not talking about anything ground-breaking here, but familiar sonic territory is staked out well, on an album of 12 original songs. Title track It's Been A While could have been a Dylan out-take, with a slide-embellished acoustic vibe that bears some resemblance to Meet Me In The Morning from Blood On The Tracks. Every Time I Hear That Song is a Springsteen-styled celebration of good music, while the churchy-sounding slow piano arpeggios on Would You Help Me To Be Strong Lord give some idea of what The Boss might sound like if he started taking his cradle Catholicism that bit more seriously. The CD closes with Lost In A Quarantine, a love ballad lyrically centred on the loneliness of missing out on your significant other on account of the lockdown. Frustratingly, the sleeve gives only skimpy details of who plays what, but musicianship from the others involved is of a high standard throughout. Stu-

dio session guitar geeks will be pleased to hear 1970s legend Waddy Wachtel contributions on a couple of tracks on guitar. Superior in terms of its genre, so good in fact that my partner overhead me playing it and asked if it was Bruuuuce. If you like the man himself, you'll like this guy.

DAVID OSLER

REVEREND NATHON

VOLUME 1

DUP STUDIOS

BOOM, straight into a driving beat and gravel voice sounds, this is right up my street. On guitar and vocals, Reverend Nathan Dees, drums Gary Delz and on bass Aaron Dees, who also designed the cover for this rocking bluesy album. The first thing that strikes me as I listen is for a three-piece band, they sound like there's so much more going on, the switching between funky and blues guitar is quite unique and by the third song, Bi-polar Blues I'm loving the switches because they get it right and believe me, some don't/can't. A Love Like Yours, has a sound all of its own with some wonderful guitar that reminds me of Santana, it flows so effectively that it draws you in and holds onto your ears until the all too quick end. Twelve songs on an album are pretty much the standard but with the guitar that plays on these songs it seems so much longer but not in a way that you'd get bored, but like a story you need to hear. Better Day has a guitar solo that to me makes this my favourite track on the album. Going Fishing paints, a picture of a bamboo pole and a jar of worms on the Mississippi River followed then by Autumn Breeze that has my rod in the water whilst I lay on the bank in the sunshine. The Reverend hails from Texas and you can tell, he has a sound somewhere between Freddie King and Billy Gibbons and should be listened to. Throw in the road gravel voice and you get a truly remarkable sound, whatever these boys have been catching, their bait is great because they've caught me.

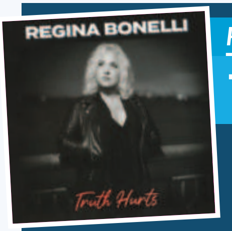
BARRY BLUESBARN HOPWOOD

ROSEDALE JUNCTION

STOMPIN' ON THE FRONT PORCH

CENTER BLOCK RECORDS

Rosedale Junction are fronted by the singer songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Toby Soriero who resides in Boston. On this twelve-track debut release he mixes all types of musical styles rooted in blues, bluegrass, country, rhythm and blues and a touch of rock and roll, the groove throughout is infectious and stays with the listener throughout. Starting with Prison Yard Blues which is all about the raspy vocal delivery of John Lee Sanders backed by Tyra Juliet's lilting vocals and then there's Trent Williamson on harmonica blending the tune together, just stunning. Brass City Blues incorporates horns and Roger Smith's Hammond organ, Dgiovahni Denize on vocals adds another tone, rhythm section keeps a great beat. Prepare for a country hoedown on The Blizzard Of '73, catchy tune. Bourbon Man has two versions, the first is slow and mellow, with a mean slide acoustic vibe. Baby Come On Home the Led Zeppelin cover is divine, with Rachel Gavaletz vocals nailing this ballad sweetly, similarly on I'd Rather Go Blind. Walk



REGINA BONELLI

TRUTH HURTS

True Groove Records

In 2021 I had the enormous pleasure of interviewing Regina for Blues Matters Magazine. I had come to know the work of True Groove Records and The True Groove All-Stars through its founder Tomas DonckerTruth Hurts opens with the very funky title track, which gives you a warm feeling from the off. Regina can go from delicate to the devil in a milli-second with ease. Alongside the guitars of Tomas Doncker and James Dellatacoma, she rides the crest of the funky wave as if she owns it. Not only does she possess a voice that cuts through to your soul, but she also plays keyboards on the album. The True Groove All-Stars provide magnificent backing to Regina on every track on the album. Cross To Bear, written by Greg Allman, brings the blues side of Regina so eloquently. It teases you with her vocal range that few could match even if they dared. Add to that a bit of funk and soul, just

"this is where the overwhelming talent that Regina has comes to the fore"

for good measure, and what you have is a song that seems like this is where she was meant to go as an artist. Mr. Big Man is everything that I want, and everything that I search for within blues music. Playing with this band of amazing musicians, Regina has her home, both musically and spiritually. This one track sums up why I became a blues journalist just as much as when I first heard Robert Johnson. Blues, funk, and soul are closely linked in many ways, what Regina has done is integrate them where each genre has room to breathe. That is easier said than done, but when you listen to this album you will see why. Killing Floor has been covered by many artists in many differing variations. Forget Doxon and Wolf, this is where the overwhelming talent that Regina has comes to the fore. It is not just another cover version, this is a statement of what Regina is all about as an artist. The blues is where she rightly belongs, this album explains that in a way that other artists can only dream of. Magnifique.

STEPHEN HARRISON

18+

WHAT IS
AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME -

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RONNIE EARL & THE BROADCASTERS

MERCY ME

Stony Plain Records

This is Ronnie Earl's twenty eighth album; twelve songs featuring Diane Blue on vocals, Forrest Padgett on drums, Paul Kochanski on upright and bass guitar and Dave Limina on Hammond B3 and piano.

They all provide backing for Ronnie's soulful and intricate guitar work. The theme is about having mercy for the world and is a very honest and heart-warming release. It starts with a tribute to Muddy Waters, Blow Wind Blow. Then another instrumental, a cover of the emotional John Coltrane track Alabama about racism. Blues For Ruthie Foster was written by Ronnie a flowing acoustic vibe to this one.

"The Mark Pontin Group represent Welsh musical talent at it's finest"

Soul Searching, brings horns to the sonic display, understated keyboards just sublime but it's the sweet guitar playing that resonates. Drum roll for the laid back, Blues For Duke Robillard, slow blues with passion and feeling.

Only You Know And I Know is sung with gusto a real upbeat tune full of soul on this Dave Mason cover. A Prayer For Tomorrow tones the release down with mellow keyboards by Anthony Geraci who co-wrote this with Ronnie, sublime. Dave's Groove another instrumental gets the band in full swing. Please Send Me Someone To Love has that raw live feeling, so relaxing.

Coal Train Blues has jazzy tones, Ronnie wrote this in the chord of "E". The Sun Shines Brightly is a slow blues number, Diane wrote and sung this, a highlight and tribute to blues legends we have lost. Jackie Wilson's Higher And Higher, closes this stunning release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

Me Home Tonight is a slow electric blues track, with soaring guitar solos and organ interplaying. Tempo change on the Texas blues shuffle Chasin' The Devil. Grandma's Hands, the Bill Withers cover has soul and gospel added to the musical palette. Vito Gutillo's violin playing on the first version of The Ballad Of The Leatherman French is very evocative underscoring well delivered vocals; the alternate version is an instrumental one. Finally, Song For The Life, Rodney Crowell's cover is a lilting country blues tune, the arrangement is sublime. Highly recommended.

COLIN CAMPBELL

SCOTT ELLISON

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE NIGHT

LIBERATION

For his Thirteenth album release, There's Something About The Night, Scott Ellison features his primary backing and touring band on some tracks and an array of Los Angeles based all-stars including members of Eric Clapton's band and Albert Lee's band on others. With its driving rhythm and some classy guitar work the shuffle Half A Bottle Down, opens the album in fine style. The title track There's Something About The Night, a slower soulful ballad held together by some excellent keyboard work, with the guitar once again laying down some fine licks. Ellison delivers real emotion with his vocals and guitar work on this tasty cover of Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City. Bury Your Bone At Home, a swinging blues jazz track driven along by the double bass beat with the keys and guitar riffing keeping the tempo upbeat. Chris Campbell takes over the vocals for the driving blues rocker Blowin Like A Hurricane. Salina has a danceable grooving beat, with upbeat accordion giving it a good Zydeco vibe, following on with the blues rocker Meat And Potatoes featuring some nice slide guitar and harmonica work, while Feast Or Famine has a stax feel with soulful vocals and some blistering horns throughout, this is followed by the slower blues of Good Year For The Blues driven by Heartfelt vocals and wailing guitar work. Mirror Image is held together with a tight rhythm and more solid piano, with grittier guitar work. The album closes with Where Do You Go When You Leave, with guest guitarist Albert Lee supplying some fine work on this upbeat blues. An excellent album from beginning to end, highly recommended.

SHIRL

SLIM BUTLER

BONE DEEP

SLIMCUTS

Working in the dark a bit here with this one. It's a six-piece Finnish band led by Jarmo 'Slim' Puhakka, vocals, guitars, dobro. The packaging is luridly enticing with what appears to be Aliens playing guitar. Musically, this is very enjoyable because these guys make a solid, rolling racket kicking off with obvious evidence of listening to Hendrix with the forceful rocking blues Ain't No Excuse. Plenty of meaty guitar sounds from Tapid Vlinen, Harri Raudaskoski blend perfectly. There's bluesy balladeering and some true surprises to demonstrate this outfit's versatility. For example, track nine, C'est la Vie, could have been recorded in a Parisian café, complete

with Slim's angst-ridden lyrics and a Django-flavoured rhythm supplemented by an atmospheric bandoneon (it's a cross between an accordion and a concertina) played by Tatu Kantomaa, which anchors the French ambience like a pack of Gitanes. These guys are good musicians, and Slim's vocals stand out clear and expressive. The guitar solos, for example on Why Doncha, are superb and Jartsa Kavonen's drums on the busy Slim on Ice could inspire plenty of leaping around. For us way west of the Baltic Finland seems such a long way off, but the power of the blues moves Slim Butler's fine band right into our own back yard. Finland's got millions of trees, thousands of islands, and judging by this, a grasp of Americana which spans continents.

ROY BAINTON

STEPHEN DOSTER

OVER THE RED SEA

FAW RECORDS

Music connects people together through a shared inclination for genres and artists. And there are some artists that aficionados gravitate towards who have a significant influence upon listeners' tastes via their own recorded music, songwriting, musical direction, and production. Some seemingly navigate their musical map wearing an invisibility cloak and, like a strange creature who comes out of the blue and back to life, it could be argued that Stephen Doster fits this bill like a duck to water. As a notable guitarist and music director, he worked with Nanci Griffith on her much-loved early records. Dr. John and Willie Nelson have covered his songs whilst also being an in-demand producer. Over The Red Sea is Doster's third solo release in seven years and it's a musical travelogue on which his weathered voice, offset by acoustic guitar, sets a mournful tone on opener When I Cross The Divide. The gentle acoustic picking on the introduction to The Singing Bus Driver is redolent of Nick Drake on a tune about the troubles in Ireland that lopes along to soothing effect. There's a 70s country-rock and folk vibe driving the beating heart of these songs especially on Anything Could Happen and A Better World that has a Gene Clark DNA spiralling through their arrangements. The wistful and reflective sensory lyrics on Blue Heron put the listener right in the picture as does most of Doster's song narratives. Paradoxically, there's a bittersweet melancholia on these songs particularly on the musically upbeat Who's Crying Now and The Sweet Life. Doster's dolorous delivery on Rooster Crows adds further gravitas to this album of acoustic based country, folk - blues as the instrumental Black Cat's Stroll illustrates nifty guitar picking to close out a recording of many mysterious charms.

PAUL DAVIES

STEVE DAWSON

GONE, LONG GONE

BLACK HEN MUSIC

Originally from Vancouver, Canada but now based in Nashville, Tennessee, pre-pandemic singer, guitarist and song-writer Steve Dawson was a busy man, touring and recording, producing a bunch of roots artists, and also responsible for a regular podcast. Enter

SUNNY BLEAU & THE MOONS

BREAKFAST SERVED COLD

Independent

Debut album from Sunny Bleau and her band featuring their modern blues sound with shades of jazz, soul and country on 11 mostly original tracks. Opener Let It Slide is a slinky, late-night number featuring sultry vocals from SB and cool backing from Nic Cocco on guitar, Alex Karasinski on bass and Paul Kastik on drums. He's My Peach follows a similar template as Bleau's vocals become more impassioned. The emotional ballad On Your Way To Me features softly crooned vocals and light atmospheric guitar fills from Cocco. As the title implies the pace and attack picks up significantly on Holy Water And Hell Fire a burning rocker featuring driving bass, sizzling guitar and preaching vocals as Bleau insists "she's no angel, you're no devil". Johnny Mercer's jazzy old favourite Autumn Leaves gets a complete makeover here with a slightly Latin feel and features soulful vocals, catchy guitar fills and jittering drums. The upbeat number Winning zips along splendidly as Bleau tells her man in no uncertain terms "pack your bags and leave the screen door slamming", no argument from me Sunny. The foreboding tones of King Of Hearts features fiercely riffing guitar work and grinding vocals as Bleau tears apart her man and tells him "I've turned the tables on you". In contrast Bedroom Rendezvous is a soft, cooing, come and get it if you dare invitation but also serves as a warning to be careful. Sparrow Song is a very pretty but, somewhat sad, song about a bird trying to break out of its gilded cage. A sax flourish introduces the swinging Denver, and the album closes with dreamy sax work and Sunny's impassioned vocals with I Should be Sleeping. This album should appeal to those who prefer the lighter pop-blues end of the spectrum rather than deep Chicago blues.

"This album should appeal to those who prefer the lighter pop-blues end of the spectrum"

DAVE DRURY

THE BLUES BAND

SO LONG

Repertoire Records

So, this is the final album from The Blues Band. After forty years together this is the last album to coincide with their farewell tour. So Long contains 16 tracks in all, and each one is a gem. Hard Times Killing Floor is the opening track, Skip James would be so proud of this version. One of the greatest blues tunes ever written is treated to the blues talents of this amazing band. Dave Kelly takes on the vocal role with Paul Jones on the Harmonica right behind him. It resembles a freight train hurtling down the track. What a way to start their final album. Only three tracks are not original songs, which means that we are privileged to enjoy the writing skills as well as the playing and singing by the band. Sweet Sweet Girl composed by Fiona Hendley and Paul Jones, is everything that you want within a blues song, nothing more, nothing less. Dave Kelly adds a lovely piece of slide guitar to make it even more special. Them Ol' Crossroads Blues introduces boogie-woogie into the frame. A high-tempo foot-stompin' tune that will make any bad day instantly turn good. I defy

"A fitting ending to a marvellous journey "

anyone to remain seated as they listen to this tune. This whole album is so full of good vibes. Each member takes a turn at the lead vocals apart from Rob Townsend who keeps the ship steady on the drums. One cover that I did not expect was, To Love Somebody, originally written and performed by The Bee Gees. It is a million miles away from that well-known version. In the beginning, I was rather skeptical as to how this would play out. Silly me, It is a wonderful take on a classic. Simply stunning in its arrangement and delivery. Tom McGuiness provides the lead vocal on Bring On The Blues which he also wrote. His vocals are a touch on the dark side, but within the blues that can only mean feeling and understanding, which in turn pours out through the lyrics. There is so much more that I could say about So Long, but I'll leave that up to you to explore. A fitting ending to a marvellous journey through the blues with this tremendous band.

STEPHEN HARRISON

Covid, of course, and Steve has had to re-assess, he ended up working on music that might not otherwise have seen the light of day, and this is the first fruit. Dimes makes for a fine, Doctor John-ish opener, leading into the dense, New Orleans-ish King Bennie Had His Shit Together, a fairly accurate relation of the remarkable life of legendary Hawaiian musician King Bennie Nawahi. Bad Omen has a menacing blues sound that leads into a couple of Americana flavoured numbers, though both have blues tinges, I Just Get Lost has a lengthy blues interlude. Kulaniapia Waltz is an old-timey instrumental with fine Hawaiian styled guitar playing, and 6 Skeletons In A Car is an unusual number, with a lumbering rhythm (there are two drummers playing on this one) and a fierce electric guitar break. Rather unexpectedly, the album's only cover song is a version of Ronnies Lane and Woods' Ooh La La, the title track of The Faces' last album of the 70s, which keeps much of the flavour of the original. Then there is the solo guitar instrumental Cicada Sanctuary, which is an excellent vehicle for Steve's virtuoso playing, before the reflective and slightly Ry Cooder-ish Time Has Made A Fool Out Of Me brings this unfailingly entertaining and listenable album to a close

NORMAN DARWEN

SUGARAY RAYFORD

IN TOO DEEP

FORTY BELOW RECORDS

In Too Deep is one of those albums that grabs the listener from the start. Opener, Invisible Soldier is a brass-heavy funk rocker, with Sugaray Rayford's soulful vocals pushed to their limits. It is a great opener, with something of a 1970's Cop show theme to it, which is never a bad thing, and although it has a deep message, it goes straight for the feet, featuring exciting drumming, bass, guitar and keyboards. The title track is slower, with an insistent harmony part for organ, bass and guitar. No Limit to My Love is a classy bluesy soul piece, with emotive wah-wah guitar, and plenty of sonic space for Rayford's emotionally delivered vocal. Miss Information takes a fast Latin beat, and some sharp brass and guitar playing, and some fine vocals delivered against the drums. Please Take My Hand is a slow, storytelling piece, with gospel handclaps and chanting, with little else to take away from the narrative story. Gonna Lift You Up takes in Reggae rhythms, has a classic guitar solo, and some fine interjections on keyboards and brass. This is one song that lives up to its name, a feel-good groove, and some great singing. Album closer United We Stand is another lively piece, with some great slap bass playing, and some soulful brass. In Too Deep is an exciting album, with a love of high-quality musicianship, and some songs that dig deeper into issues such as PTSD, Civil rights issues, and social justice. It is the music that you will remember, but hopefully, some of the messages will have sunk in too.

BEN MACNAIR

THE 2:19

REVELATOR

INDEPENDENT

Take a Manchester based band, record an album in Northern Ireland then have it mastered on the beautiful Isle Of Skye and the result is the rather excellent Revelator. The overall sound is, and I say this

with the absolute utmost respect, rough and ready blues and is all the better for the no frills approach. I like very much my blues to be coming at me as if I was listening to it in a barn or a hot sweaty club. Bands like The 2:19 would be, I am sure, at the forefront of the post pandemic live scene. Okay so here we have a thirteen-track album, in a simple slip sleeve, split into sides One and Two. Yet another simple but effective nod to former times of vinyl and I wonder if they have a possibility of that kind of release as well? I don't know but if yes I feel it would be an excellent addition to any collection in whatever formats you choose. A six piece band comprising one vocal / guitar, two further guitars, harmonica, bass and drums plus augmented organ/piano they make a grand noise. The titular track opens up before the shuffling Diamond In The Dust takes over. It is always hard to define why a particular track works for you but I very much like that and No Time To Bleed, All Kinds Of Evil plus the eerie atmospheric Old Days Coming Back complete with an extract of Wayfaring Stranger at the end. Interestingly a totally stripped back different version of the Revelator reappears second to last. For me it is the stronger way to perform it as it rambles along, almost in Gospel Second Line mode. Yes I like this and will play it often.

GRAEME SCOTT

THE 251'S

'BOUT TIME!

INDEPENDENT

This is the second album from The 251's and they cement their lovely amalgam of Essex Delta blues, swing and jazz. There is a well-balanced mix of originals and carefully selected covers that highlights not only the experience within the band but the obvious love and care they feel for the music. Walking With Thaddeus is the opener, a wonderfully understated song about a love won and lost. One Mint Julep is a cover the Rudy Toombs song, a great choice, avoiding the more obvious One Bourbon, One Scotch. Yes, Rudy liked a drinking song. Super harp next from vocalist Steve Tolton on Jimmy Reed tune Ain't That Loving You Baby. A high energy blues that benefits greatly by the band emphasising feel overpower. That vibe continues with Jacqueline, one of five Tolton/Russ Cottee compositions on the album. Stormy Weather opens with tasty sax provided by guest Graham West, the band delivers a version respectful to the original whilst still making it their own, beautiful rhythm section from Roy Webber (drums) and Cliff MacDonald. Another super blues cover choice is Too Late by the legendary Willie Dixon. Exactly Like You is a much loved and covered song but the risk of doing it pays off as the band seamlessly give it their own stamp. She's So Complicated is an original that stands up alongside the more familiar cover versions. She's Gone (Long Gone) next, and it's another well written tasteful blues, love Russ Cottee's guitar and Roy Webber's drumming on this. Along with opener Thaddeus, Payphone Down The Hall is my personal favourite track. Josh Emdon guests on piano on this and fills out the overall sound. This is an original but could easily be mistaken for a classic Chicago blues tune. We finish with Michael's Theme, written by Harry Stoneman and if it sounds familiar, it is, it was the Parkinson Show Theme music for many years. The 251's bring together many years of experience and give the music authentic but fresh feel. Buy the album or see them live, you won't regret it.

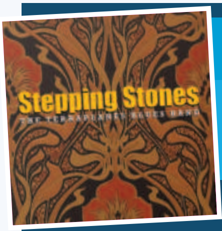
STEVE YOURGLIVCH

THE CLARA ROSE BAND

LIVE, LIVE, LOVE

INDEPENDENT

I live a sheltered life as I've never heard of Clara Rose despite her being a thing across the Irish Sea, the very same Irish Sea that I can see out my window. That's my loss as Ms Rose has been wowing the music world for nigh on a decade now and, luckily for us, managed to sneak in a couple of concert recordings just before the world turned dark. Oh, and the title is pronounced live, lyve, love, seeing as how you're asking. Anyway, back to the record which was recorded in Spring of 2020 at two venues, Arthur's Blues And Jazz Club in Dublin and The Garage Theatre



THE TERRAPLANES BLUES BAND

STEPPING STONES

Independent

Hard hitting, stomping, in your face rhythm and blues; The Terraplanes Blues Band debut is an absolute powerful energetic and classy release. With cool debonair front man singer songwriter and guitarist Nick Scrase, the vocal delivery is impressive. Eduardo Allen on harmonica is effervescent; Tom Turner on drums and Andy Wood on bass provide the rhythm section. Twelve original songs evoking tones of Dr Feelgood, especially on Ain't Had No Lovin' and traditional Bristol delta blues, this is not your average blues band. Highway 61 sets the trend with distinctive stomping beat and a steady pace. Proud of their heritage, they allude to this on tunes like, North Street Blues and Night Bus. Tempo changes throughout, with a New Orleans vibe on The Ballad Of Ragtime Texas, the story told with a real swagger then Eduardo peppers the tune with fine harmonica. Another slow tune, The Lonesome Crow is full of dark shades and would make a great film soundtrack, simple but effective arrangement, a real grower of a track. Stepping Stones, has a real swagger and tone to it, it expands the band's natural chemistry and a feel for the blues genre. Rattlesnake Blues has a shuffle feel, whilst Pick Myself Up is relaxed blues. My Malaise has some intricate guitar riffs and a driving beat, high octane stuff, these tunes will fill the dancefloor, as will Get Along. Don't Do Me Wrong slows the pace and is full of rhythm. This band is on the rise, catch them when you can, brilliant release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

RMR TOP 50

Roots Music Report's Blues album chart

POS	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL
1	DEVIL MAY CARE	TINSLEY ELLIS	ALLIGATOR
2	SO FAR SO GOOD	PETER VETESKA & BLUES TRAIN	BLUE HEART
3	TEMPTING FATE	CAROLYN WONDERLAND	ALLIGATOR
4	STOMPING GROUND	DION	KEEPING THE BLUES ALIVE
5	OPEN ROAD	COLIN JAMES	STONY PLAIN
6	PINKY'S BLUES	SUE FOLEY	STONY PLAIN
7	HEALING KIND OF BLUES	VAL STARR & THE BLUES ROCKET	SANDWICH FACTORY
8	THE SUN IS SHINING DOWN	JOHN MAYALL	FORTY BELOW
9	THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE NIGHT	SCOTT ELLISON	LIBERATION HALL
10	HEAVY LOAD BLUES	GOV'T MULE	CONCORD
11	FULLY CHARGED	KATHY MURRAY & THE KILOWATTS	BLUE HEART
12	T. CASTRO:A BLUESMAN CAME TO TOWN	TOMMY CASTRO	ALLIGATOR
13	SERVE IT TO ME HOT	CHICKENBONE SLIM	VIZZTONE
14	662	CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM	ALLIGATOR
15	THAT'S MY NAME	BOB STROGER & THE HEADCUTTERS	DELMARK
16	HIGHS & LOWS	BERNARD ALLISON	RUF
17	ONE LOUDER	MISTY BLUES	LUNARIA
18	GOIN' BACK	PIERCE DIPNER	SELF-RELEASE
19	DIGGING IN JOHN'S BACKYARD	GRANT DERMODY AND FRANK FOTUSKY	SELF-RELEASE
20	RISE	ANGELA EASLEY	CLASS A
21	GOOD TO BE...	KEB MO	ROUNDER
22	LEAVE THE LIGHT ON	THE LOVE LIGHT ORCHESTRA	NOLA BLUE
23	BIGMAN	BIG LLOU JOHNSON	GOLDEN VOICE
24	CROWN	ERIC GALES	PROVOGUE
25	ON MY WAY	KATIE HENRY	RUF
26	B-SIDE OF MY LIFE	JON SPEAR BAND	SELF-RELEASE
27	LAYLA REVISITED [FEAT. TREY ANASTASIO]	TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND	CONCORD
28	FASTER	SAMANTHA FISH	ROUNDER
29	THE BLUES ALBUM	JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR	KEEPING THE BLUES ALIVE
30	DO RIGHT, SAY RIGHT	MISSISSIPPI MACDONALD	ANOTHER PLANET
31	BLUES THAT YOU CHOOSE	STEVE SHANHOLTZER	SELF-RELEASE
32	SET SAIL	NORTH MISSISSIPPI ALLSTARS	NEW WEST
33	BLOW	COLIN LINDEN	HIGHWAY 20
34	HOLLER IF YOU HEAR ME	ALTERED FIVE BLUES BAND	BLIND PIG
35	SUGAR HIP YA YA	DIONNE BENNETT	HUNNIA
36	BLUES FROM CHICAGO TO PARIS	KENNY "BLUES BOSS" WAYNE	STONY PLAIN
37	LOVE ONE ANOTHER	BIG AL & THE HEAVYWEIGHTS	VIZZTONE
38	RAISIN' CAIN	CHRIS CAIN	ALLIGATOR
39	I'M NOT FROM CHICAGO	DEBRA POWER	SELF-RELEASE
40	TRUTH HURTS	REGINA BONELLI	TRUE GROOVE
41	75 AND ALIVE	JOHNNY TUCKER FT KID RAMOS	BLUE HEART
42	BUFFALO NICHOLS	BUFFALO NICHOLS	FAT POSSUM
43	LIVE ACOUSTIC SESSION (LIVE)	LITTLE G WEEVIL	HUNNIA
44	BLUES ALL OVER MY SHOES	HANNA PK	VIZZTONE
45	SAVAGE'S LIFE	THE SUGAR ROOTS	LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE
46	ROSE-COLORED GLASSES, VOL. 1	TERESA JAMES & THE RHYTHM TRAMPS	BLUE HEART
47	STRIKE UP THE BAND	PROFESSOR LOUIE & THE CROWMATIX	WOODSTOCK
48	TIL THE MONEY'S GONE	GUITAR JACK WARGO	WAR GOD
49	LONG AS I GOT MY GUITAR	ZAC HARMON	CATFOOD
50	DAMAGE CONTROL	CURTIS SALGADO	ALLIGATOR

www.rootsmusicreport.com

in Ms Rose's hometown of Monaghan. There's a whole host of musicians chipping as the lineup varied across the shows but to a man (and woman) they're all in fine fettle. Ms Rose herself can belt out a stomper and draw you in with an intimate whisper which is a rare treat. Take a listen to Love Me Like A Man and tell me I'm wrong. It's a brave singer who takes on a song that the likes of Bonnie Raitt and Diane Krall have had a go at. But damn it's good. There are four original songs here alongside eight covers with Throw The Dice the best of them. Elsewhere she gives us her take on I'd Rather Go Blind as well as a very interesting version of Jolene, the Dolly Parton tune. Her mammy chips in on vocals on a couple of songs and the horn arrangements are a delight from start to finish. A thoroughly enjoyable release even if it does end with a Bob Dylan song.

STUART A HAMILTON

VARIOUS ARTISTS

THE DIDDLEY DADDY SOUND

ATOMICAT

If you are a fan of the Bo Diddley sound, you might well like this collection of essentially obscure recordings based on the distinctive riff that Ellas Otha Bates McDaniel (Bo Diddley) made famous across the blues and rock 'n roll world. However, be prepared to listen to some stranger variations on the theme, since it also contains some novelty tracks, which are not blues inspired. A prime example is Brontosaurus Stomp by The Piltdown Men from 1960, which, although containing the essential riff, somehow also manages to sound like an alternative version of the theme tune to the Benny Hill Show. Amongst the genuine blues tunes is Little Walter's take on a Bo Diddley song, I Hate To See You Go, recorded on 28th April 25, 1955, on which Bo features on guitar along with Willie Dixon on bass. Jay Swan's version of You Don't Love Me, which contains a riff used by numerous blues bands, but possibly most famously by the Allman Brothers Band on their 1971 album, At Fillmore East, was based on Bo's song She's Fine She's Mine. Bo also recorded his take on this song in 1959 along with his harmonica player, Billy Boy Arnold. One of Billy's signature tunes I Wish You Would, a great version of which later appeared on his 1970's album Checkin' It Out, where Tony McPhee partnered him on guitar, also appears in the collection. (This really brought home to me just what an extended career the great blues harpist has had.) Whilst still blues, but not containing the rhythmic jungle beat, the track Mannish Boy is also included in the selection, by dint of Bo having been one its three composers, Morganfield, London & McDaniel. An even more tenuous inclusion on the CD is Etta James's response to Mannish Boy, W-O-M-A-N. The Crickets' Not Fade Away also features on the CD and was covered by a British band in the early sixties, who did anything but fade away. The whole CD makes an interesting, if not always serious, study of the influence Mr Diddley had with his ideocratic sound.

STEVE BANKS

THE HOLLYWOOD FLAMES

BUZZ BUZZ BUZ – THE SINGLES COLLECTION 1950-62

ACROBAT MUSIC

Doo-wop holds a very special place in the heart of rhythm-and-blues, and blues music. Born from the street corners of endless American towns and cities where groups of young men passed the time under streetlamps learning to harmonise and hone their faultless vocal interactions into a style that has spawned hundreds of groups and thousands of singles through the decades from their start in the early 1950's. One such group was The Hollywood Flames, who first formed in 1949, and lasted through to the early sixties. During that time, they evolved through a bewildering variety of names and line-ups, at least seven distinct name changes, and too-many-to-mention, or especially care about, personnel changes. Our r'n'b and doo-wop forefathers would have had to spend months, even years, trawling through record shops looking for those hard-to-find platters to complete their collections, but of course, we are spoiled rotten with modern technology, which gathers a staggering seventy-eight tracks together across a tidy and easily stored three-CD set. The style is uniform, why spoil a successful formula, across the gamut of jaunty dance numbers to deeply sad and emotional songs of love and loss. Throughout there is that gorgeous vintage atmosphere that takes the listener right back to the jazz clubs and bars of America sixty and more years ago. It's a style that has fallen out of fashion for more modern tastes, but for those who find pleasure in doo-wop, as I do, this is a wonderful collection of lost gems unearthed and polished for modern fans to enjoy. Doo-wop has a timeless appeal, and its easy to see how its unique style has reached into the vocals and writing styles of countless blues and r 'n' b bands who have followed on. History teaches us that to know where we are going, we have to examine where we have been, and that lesson is even more important for fans of blues music. Check out this collection and enjoy the music of a gentler and less frantic age, when voices were sweet and songs were simple. Sublime.

ANDY HUGHES

THE LOVELIGHT ORCHESTRA

LEAVE THE LIGHT ON

NOLA BLUE RECORDS

The inspiration for this CD and the name of this band was based on Bobby "Blue" Bland's 1961 classic hit Turn On You Lovelight. John Nemeth is a highly experienced and well-respected vocalist and here he is backed by a nine-piece band of seasoned Memphis musicians. Opening track Time Is Fading Fast kicks in with a horn flourish followed by the honeyed tones of Nemeth and the full power of the swinging orchestra. An excellent and attention-grabbing start. Lead guitarist Joe Restivo wrote the opening track and his superb guitar skills feature heavily on the dynamic slow blues Come On Moon. Nemeth's emotive vocals shine brightly as the horn section riff furiously and drive along the catchy Give Me A Break to a big finish. This album is a high-class celebration of Memphis soul/blues from the 50's/60's era taken to the next level by this superb band. The sole cover here is B. B. King's first big hit 3 O'clock Blues which is given a slightly Latin treatment, and this is followed by After All a classic old timey blues-ballad. The relaxed

Most Played Album Top 40 – February 2022

Collated From The Playlists Of The Independent Blues Broadcasters Association Members

Position	Artist	Album
1	THE CINELLI BROTHERS	VILLA JUKEJOINT
2	MIKE ZITO	BLUES FOR THE SOUTHSIDE
3	EMMA WILSON	WISH HER WELL
4	JOHN MAYALL	THE SUN IS SHINING DOWN
5	ELLES BAILEY	SHINING IN THE HALF LIGHT
6	ANDY LINDQUIST	MY NAME IS MUD
7	LOUISIANA RED & BOB CORRITORE	TELL ME 'BOUT IT
8	STEVE BAILEY FEATURING MISSISSIPPI MACDONALD	CRAZY 'BOUT YOU: A TRIBUTE TO SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
9	THE BLUES BAND	SO LONG
10	THE TERRAPLANES BLUES BAND	STEPPING STONES
11	KATHY MURRAY & THE KILOWATTS	FULLY CHARGED
12	ALBERT CASTIGLIA	I GOT LOVE
13	MISTY BLUES	ONE LOUDER
14	AUTOMATIC SLIM	DOWN BY THE WATERSIDE
15	BACKWATER ROLL FEAT. JON AMOR	LIVE AT THE PLATFORM
16	BOB STROGER & THE HEADCUTTERS	THAT'S MY NAME
17	JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR	THE BLUES ALBUM
18	REGINA BONELLI	TRUTH HURTS
19	LARRY MCCRAY	BLUES WITHOUT YOU
20	ERIC GALES	CROWN
21	PRAKASH SLIM	COUNTRY BLUES FROM NEPAL
22	THE BRITISH BLUESCASTING CORPORATION	HIGH HORSE
23	BIG AL & THE HEAVYWEIGHTS	LOVE ONE ANOTHER
24	PETER VETESKA & BLUES TRAIN	SO FAR SO GOOD
25	THE LOVE LIGHT ORCHESTRA	LEAVE THE LIGHT ON
26	DAN PATLANSKY	SHELTER OF BONES
27	PROFESSOR LOUIE & THE CROWMATIX	STRIKE UP THE BAND
28	BRIAN AUGER'S OBLIVION EXPRESS	AUGER INCORPORATED
29	BOB CORRITORE & FRIENDS	DOWN HOME BLUES REVUE
30	BERNARD ALLISON	HIGHS & LOWS
31	JOHNNY WINTER	ROOTS
32	BLUE TOUCH	THE MUSIC OF ROBERT JOHNSON
33	BETH HART	A TRIBUTE TO LED ZEPPELIN
34	TRUDY LYNN	GOLDEN GIRL
35	RUZZ GUITAR'S BLUES REVUE	LIVE! AGAINST THE GRAIN
36	STEVE SHANHOLTZER	BLUES THAT YOU CHOOSE
37	TINSLEY ELLIS	DEVIL MAY CARE
38	DEBRA POWER	I'M NOT FROM CHICAGO
39	JAMIE WILLIAMS & THE ROOTS COLLECTIVE	MOVE THE PLANET
40	THE BLUES AGAINST YOUTH	AS THE TIDE GETS HIGH & LOW

blues shuffle of Tricklin' Down features great work from the horns and more of Restivo's impressive guitar skills. The jumping number Open Book bounces along splendidly and this is one that will keep the dancers happy. A great burst of boogie-woogie piano from Gerald Stephens lights up the barnstorming title track Leave The Lights On with the whole band celebrating in party mode. The album closes with the rousing Follow The Queen featuring the brass section soaring high and a sizzling yakety sax solo. Great stuff! All lovers of B.B. King, Bobby "Blue" Band, Big Joe Turner and Junior Parker etc. will enjoy this fine album.

DAVE DRURY

THE PRETTY THINGS

LIVE AT THE BBC

REPERTOIRE RECORDS

As time ticks on, and we lose more and more of our blues legends, either from live and recording work, or tragically, permanently, it is even more important that we not only appreciate and remember their work, and their influence, but that we preserve it for future generations to enjoy. All praise then to the BBC, who have collected this comprehensive and essential collection of live recordings of seminal r 'n' b legends The Pretty Things. From back in the days when ground-breaking and seriously exciting live and studio bands like The Pretties were still being referred to in Queen's English as 'happening beat combos' by men old enough to be their dads, come exploding guitars, thundering drums and wailing harps in such tight combinations that it's easy to forget that these are live cuts with no overdubs or any studio trickery. With sounds that absolutely embrace and echo the early Stones, The Pretty Things show that they absolutely should have enjoyed a similar level of success with the record-buyers and concert goers at the time. If you are new to the band, or even a casual fan, it's important to remember not only the diversity of their music, from its earliest r 'n' b roots, to the experimental cuts like SF Sorrow Is Born, but the length of time that The Pretty Things spent churning out peerless r 'n'b tracks with a level of superiority that is barely matched, much less surpassed by any of their contemporaries, and certainly not by their successors. Accompanying the set is a comprehsnvie booklet featuring reproduced posters and flyers from the band's career, and quotes from the band. There can't be many bands who can produce a live collection with intros as diverse as Brian Mathew at one end, and John Peel at the other. Standout has to be their version of Johnny B Goode, no matter how many versions of this song there are, only a vital few band can make this chestnut sound like it's their own work, and The Pretty Things manage that feat to perfection. Wonderful.

ANDY HUGHES

THE SUGAR ROOTS

SAVAGE'S LIFE

LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE

Slippin', slidin' and groovin' out of Oregon are The Sugar Roots. A fine R&B band fronted by Chad Rupp on vocals and harmonica (as well as guitar and piano) and with Jason 'JT' Thomas on guitar, Samuel Gendier on keys, Timmer Blakely on bass and Chandler Bowerman on drums. Formed as a band only a year ag, this is their debut album, but the various members have been around the Northwestern US scene for many years and their sound typifies the slightly laid-back R&B sound of the area. The album consists of new material and reworking of a couple of classic songs, although you won't immediately recognize the covers. Steve Miller's Rock'n Me (Keep On Rocking Me Baby) is a perfect example as they have slowed it down and added all the sass and sexiness of a soul band. Of the Chad Rupp written numbers, Something Wicked This Way Comes is killer. Dark and powerful bass lines overplaying the vocals a guitar lines that sit to the side as though pointing out the Something Wicked. Going Nowhere Fast opens the album with some superb harp playing and jazz-tinged guitar, organ wailing in the back underpins the harp and I found it was a track I went back to time and again. Jimmy Reed's It's A Sin gets a brilliantly louche treatment and Rupp's vocal has a great depth and timbre. All around, a really good album and their sound suggests that they would be a great live band too.

ANDY SNIPPER

THE WATER-STREET BLUES BAND

TALKIN ABOUT

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

This is the second album from Ontario based Waterstreet Blues Band and shows why they have been gaining traction over the last three years or so. A five piece with vocals shared between bassist Paul Sapounzi and keys player Silvia Dee. Talkin About is the opener and is high energy power blues that sets a high bar with Paul on vocals. With barely a gap they launch into a super cover of Samantha Fish song Miles To Go, with Silvia on vocals and accordion. The whole band are so tight, and the chemistry flows out of the speakers. Vodka Drinkin Woman is next, with Paul showing another side of his voice, edging towards Waits, snarling out the search for his perfect woman. Super support on this from Rob Deyman on guitar and harp from Chris Melleck. Riverside Child slows the pace, a slow blues delivered vocally by Silvia, reminiscing about her about her childhood. Walked Away opens with a menacing guitar break, Silvia on vocals again on this tale of leaving a relationship. Some more super harp and guitar from Chris and Rob. We get some swinging blues on Laugh To Keep From Cryin' showing another side to the band that they deliver with aplomb, Paul on lead vocals and Silvia getting the chance to show off her keys chops. Mean Vicious Woman is a great song, love the line, she's wrapped in polyester, but acting like its mink. Don't Stop comes in at just over three minutes, a snappy blues work out. Then we get a cover of Tom Waits Temptation, with Silvia providing accordion and vocals giving a different slant to the original. Baby Be Strong is listed as a bonus track on my copy. A soulful ballad about being apart but meeting up for the Christmas holidays that is tasteful bit probably doesn't fit with the rest of what is a solid high-quality blues album that I highly recommend. I will certainly be looking out for further projects from the band.

STEVE YOURGLIVCH

ROBBEN FORD & THE BLUE LINE

LIVE AT YOSHI'S

Repertoire Records

Recorded in the early 90s as Robben Ford was forging a solo career, this album with The Blue Line highlights how prolific a singer/songwriter, musician Ford has become. Philly Blues kicks off the 2 CD set, a lively instrumental that introduces the band to the audience with such fine playing. This band is as tight as two coats of paint. I have listened in great detail to a lot of Ford's music over the years, but this is the first one in a live setting. A fantastic way to get acquainted with his music if you are a Ford virgin. One of my all-time favourite compositions by Robben Ford is Start It Up.

The subtleness slowly builds up to a magnificent climax during which Bill Boublitz excels on the organ and piano, making the listener feel as though they are involved with every note. Lovin'Cup, written by Paul Butterfield, who was a huge influence on Ford, packs so much smooth soul into the song. What Ford does is provide it with the opportunity to encompass blues, so as which to make this an even better version than the original. CD 2 starts with a wonderful rendition of, Don't Let The Sun Catch You Cryin' once more showing Ford's ability to change direction to a softer more mellow approach. Another stalwart of the Robben Ford collection is Prison Of Love. So cleverly written with a swagger and a lurch. He captures the essence of the blues and allows it to transponder, twisting and turning from an up-tempo vibe to a bluesy wail. My overall feeling of this album is that we get to feel and enjoy the talent that Robben Ford has in spades. With his band, The Blue Line, he gives one of the great performances of his career, leaving nothing to chance, just putting his heart and soul into every tune, wringing every emotion that he has, and leaving it on the stage. This is one of the finest live blues albums I've heard in a long time, it belongs in every blues lovers collection.

STEPHEN HARRISON

THR3E

30 DAY HOP

INDEPENDENT

Not to be confused with any other similarly named outfit! There is some tough blues on this set, the UK band's debut set and a few years old now, not that this affects the quality of this set at all, or even, given that the last couple of years have been written off for many musicians, the relevance (though the line-up has now changed). Guitarist and singer Steve Woodward was with rock band Torbruk many years ago, but here he's in a high energy blues bag, even if this release is pretty much guaranteed to appeal to a rock audience as well as those looking for some raw blues. Take a listen to Sweet Thing which also boasts some excellent blues harp from Lee Vernon, and no less than Cherry Lee Mewis contributes backing vocals to four tracks. As you might have realized, there is a strong UK blues boom influence going on with this album, though this is not revival music as such. Rather, it seems to be just the direction these guys take their inspiration from, and who's complaining? Certainly not me when the music is as good as the title track, Blues For The Modern Man, the riff-propelled Driving Love (a little Howling Wolf influence here, maybe) the huge-sounding Heaven On Time with its tinges of The Rolling Stones and southern rock (nice slide guitar!), plus some blues-harp in the mix again or the out-and-out rocking blues of Man In My Condition. Really though, I can't see any readers being disappointed with any of this excellent set's dozen tracks.

NORMAN DARWEN

THR3E

HEY, MR. BARTENDER

THR3E SONGS PUBLISHING

I don't usually review an album by each song, and I haven't done it quite here however, the diversity of the sounds of each track makes it hard not to do just that. Thr3e bill themselves as Rock & Blues and that's exactly what the opening number has in spades, (Long Road Home) Open Highway, is melodic but punchy and the expertise of these guys shines through. Paint the Town Red is pure rock/blues and tells its own story, 3 tracks in and the diversity of what this band can do becomes so evident, great musicians and great harmonies. This album is a great quality production with See you, Feel You, Breathe You, taking us to a different place with regards to tempo. Reminiscent of a psychedelic in feel vibe, the vocals are a standout sparking a visual of atmospheric western landscape, real treat of a guitar piece, I see a picket fence, sound of drums running through the beat. Do That Walk, Wow. Harmonica, Bluegrass, if at least one of your feet don't start tapping I would be astonished, a square-dancing track all day long, man, it made me want to square dance. The thread that holds all these diverse tracks together is the voice of Steve Woodward and Carlos Linnett, guitar Steve Woodward and Carlos Linnett, Peter Castle on drums and percussion and RIK King on bass, blues harp and backing vocals, these guys know exactly what they are doing. If you get the chance to go and see this accomplished rock & blues band then do it, they will not disappoint.

JEAN KNAPPITT

TIM GARTLAND

TRUTH

INDEPENDENT

Truth is the fifth release from Tim Gartland, singer songwriter and wonderful harmonica player from Nashville. On these twelve tracks, he mixes blues, roots and a little old school rhythm and blues. He plays with keyboard player, Kevin McKendree, rhythm guitar and backing vocals. They are backed by rhythm section of Kenneth Blevins drummer and Steve McKey on bass guitar. Don't Mess With My Heart is the opener, a rocky blues number and warning to his partner, it has a great back beat. Leave Well Enough Alone has a Chicago blues feel Tim's deep vocals blend well to this track, it is flavoured with harmonica tones blending with guitar riffs and that piano just rocks the tune. The Thing About The Truth is co-written with Karen Leipziger, a song for our times, very mellow, lyrics are powerful. Cloudy With A Chance Of Blues is a piano driven boogie tune. Outta Sight Outta Mind keeps a great tempo. One Love Away is a highlight and a positive tune about finding love, Ray Desilvis co-wrote this certainly is a talented band. Love Knocks Once is a celebration of love on an upbeat tune. Pause, tackles problems with human relationships, harmonies are haunting. Probably Nothing, is more upbeat with some quirky lyrics. Wish I Could Go Back has harmonica and slide guitar flavouring this mellow tune. Mind Your Own Business is swinging blues a great groove here. Save Sammy Some is a closing instrumental, highlighting all band members. Highly recommended.

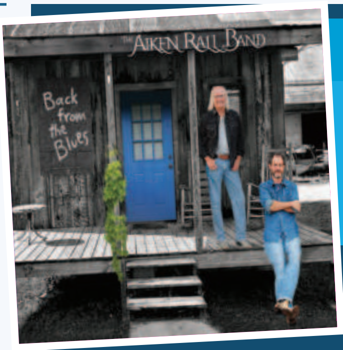
COLIN CAMPBELL

TONI MONSERRAT INC.

TRANSAM

MILANAMUSICA.COM

The premise of the album is a simple one. Toni Monserrat took a long leisurely road trip across America, from West To East, and why indeed not, then he wrote some songs about his experiences, and recorded them with a stellar band, and this is the result. As someone who really hates 'labels', and the apparently endless need for some of my writer colleagues (not on BM I hasten to add!) to categorise music as 'this' or 'that', and then stick something new in one of those pointless boxes, I am always delighted when albums like this come along, because they wilfully defy categorisation. The first couple of songs could be shoe-horned into the overloaded and redundant term 'Americana' because they sound like what it would be like if James Taylor sat in with The Eagles. But Home On The Run is fairly and squarely in Randy Newman territory, an erudite and lyrical construction assuming a level of intelligence on the part of the listener, always a pleasant experience. By Frost Margaritas, the album is hitting its stride, a sweet and doleful story that reminds the listener that we are all connected on a fundamental level, doing our best with what we've got. And you find yourself hoping that this is one of those rare albums where each song manages to be more appealing that the last, and it absolutely is. If you are someone who likes your emotions gently stretched by someone who only wants to tell you a story, then this album is for you. The Further It Is proves that Bob Dylan's influence in vocal inflection and song



THE AIKEN RALL BAND

BACK FROM THE BLUES

Independent

Florida based; The Aiken Rall Band comprise of vocalist and guitarist Hal Akin and Mitch Rall, sharing vocals and drums. They are co-writers on this nine-song release, varying in musical style and clarity. They are joined by Pip Pippin on piano and keeping a steady bass line is Michael Czapleski.

The opening track Back From The Blues has a thundering bass line, the theme seems to do with main character singing about a breakthrough in his life, now bringing a more optimistic view of his future, some mellow toned guitar work throughout, very catchy. Broken Hearted Man continues the theme, with underlying piano tones in the middle accentuating a tight band approach. Railyard, opens with a moving train then some snarly sliding guitar underpins some more fine piano from Mike Turner.

Crying Shame And A Sin is a moving ballad full of flavour and blues tones, vocals suit this yearning

> ***"a very enjoyable, well-toned and classy release"***

tearful lament. Back To Stay is another steady flowing love song. Tonight, gives a feeling of anticipation about meeting up, a Steely Dan feel to this, a good track. Scene Of The Crime is a highlight, with some fine harmonies and the rhythm section really controls this blues drenched tune.

Tin Roof changes the tone and texture, a wistful dreamy tune. Last song, Blues So Bad is a rocking tune punctuated with harmonica and backbeat rhythm. Full of differing styles a very enjoyable well-toned and classy release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

EDGAR WINTER

BROTHER JOHNNY- A TRIBUTE TO JOHNNY WINTER

Quatro Valley Records

This album is long overdue. When the world of blues lost Johnny Winter it was indeed a dark day. So, his brother Edgar hit upon the idea of getting a host of blues musicians together and performing blues classics that meant so much to Johnny. Mean Old Blues kicks off the album at a hundred miles an hour. Joe Bonamassa provides the slide guitar and Edgar supplies the vocals. It's as if the musicians on the album had been straining at the leash to get going. Edgar Winter is the main protagonist on this album, and why not, he sings and plays on a lot of the tracks. On Still Alive And Well, it's blindingly obvious why Edgar has such a starring role, it's not just because he's the brother, far from it. He has such a sweet voice that can sound like an angel, and a devil almost. simultaneously. Lone Star Blues introduces Keb Mo' to the proceedings. This would not be a fitting tribute to Johnny Winter without the inclusion

"I could go on for a fortnight about how good this album is"

of Keb Mo'. Vocals and all guitars are covered by Keb, he's one of the finest blues artists to ever walk God's green earth in my opinion. Such a talented guy, Keb strolls through this tune with abject confidence that oozes out of every pore. Johnny B Goode is one of those tunes that had to be included on this album. This version sees Edgar and Joe Walsh sharing vocal duties, with Joe Walsh playing a superb rockin' guitar boogie that would have Chuck Berry duck-walking around in heaven. I've heard many versions of this, wait until your ears feast themselves upon this masterpiece. Highway 61 Revisited once again has Edgar at the helm, joined by Kenny Wayne Sheppard on guitar. KWS knows his way around this tune so well, and doesn't it show. I could go on for a fortnight about how good this album is. Do yourselves a favour. Buy it and find out for yourselves. With a blues ensemble this good, you'd be mad not to.

STEPHEN HARRISON

construction are still alive and well, and that can only ever be a good thing. In a world of increasingly disposable and produced-beyond-saving music, it's good that the old values and attitudes are still alive and well in albums like this one. If the West to East Road trip produced this record, then hopefully a return journey will create a similarly high level of songs and stories, I'd be looking forward to it if it was.

ANDY HUGHES

VIDA BUSK& HIS TRUE BELIEVERS

THE CIVILIZED LIFE

BLUE MOOD RECORDS

Norwegian guitarist, vocalist, composer and producer Vidar Busk is someone who has grown up with blues music having travelled to the US aged 15 to play with American blues artist Rock Bottom. Fast forward to 2022 and Vidar Busk + His True Believers have released their fourth album as a band Civilized Life. Produced by Kid Andersen in Oslo, Norway and San Jose, USA this five-piece have created a ten-track record which harmonica playing cool cat Rick Estrin mused "The material is not only remarkably strong, you can also feel that man has lived every word he sings on this album". Opener Last Chance To Hurt Me is a punchy jive number with Rune Edel's swinging bass alongside Anders Hefre (Tenor Sax and Bass Clarinet) and the Greaseland Super spreader Horn Section. The reflective I Take A lot Out Of The Bottle documents a man's relationship with alcohol complete with Johnny Augland's Randy Newman-esque piano. Powerful stuff. The title track includes this atmospheric harmonica courtesy of Arne Fjeld Rasmussen as drummer Alexander Pettersen provides a steady chug on the cheeky Wait On Me Woman. The Hammond B3 Organ makes an appearance on The Wringer as Andersen showcases his many talents. I Didn't Mean To Do It Baby is a blues staple of asking for forgiveness and a vocal highlight from Busk as Sax Gordon's Baritone sax rings out. Closer Tender Hearted is penned by Rick Estrin and the addition of a second guitar creates a meaty sound for the listener to really dig. Overall, Vidar Busk + His True Believers sound a cohesive band unit and whilst the material themes such as relationships and alcohol are tried and tested in blues music the delivery is slick punchy and extremely entertaining.

GLENN SARGEANT

VIENNA CIRCLE

SECRETS OF THE RISING SUN

INDEPENDENT

Oh my this is a tough one. Again I am not familiar with this band or their previous output and I have to ask why? I like my diverse music taste and within that I have many Floyd, Genesis, Marillion, Mostly Autumn, Steve Hackett etc albums but nothing at all from Vienna Circle. So I guess you can tell that we are talking Progressive Rock here and only on a first listen I like it very much. However we are a Blues magazine and in my ears this is not Blues. Having said that I like what I hear. Formed back in 2007 by brothers Paul and Jack Davis this is, I think, album three although Jack has now left the band. Also it

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Larry McCray

BLUES WITHOUT YOU

Keeping The Blues Alive

Times have been hard for US-based blues artist Larry McCray. In recent times the bluesman has battled health issues, as well as losing his long-term manager in a tragic car accident. However, the Michigan resident's fortunes began to change when an opportunity presented itself to work with Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith on a new album on the Keeping The Blues Alive label.

Fortunately, when the esteemed pair of guitar virtuosos arrived in Detroit Larry had already written around thirty songs, which would soon become part of his new album Blues Without You. Many of these tracks come from real-life experiences. Such as the opening song and first single from the album Arkansas. The latter being an ode to home, being McCray's birthplace, and with its infectious rhythm, it certainly grabs your attention at the top of the release.

With tracks such as Without Love It Doesn't Matter and Drinkin' Liquor and Chasin' Women you can hear the prominent influence of keyboard legend Reese Wynans of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble fame. Subsequently, slide guitar master Joanna Connor also adds some fiery licks to the latter.

Further guests on the album include Gov't Mule's Warren Haynes on the acoustically tinged blues number Down To The Bottom, and also Joe Bonamassa himself on the rather groovy Mr Easy. Whilst the poignant and thought-provoking message behind Good Die Young makes you think. McCray declares, 'They say the good die young, so why am I still here?'

The recent single Breaking News perfectly grapples with and reflects on the strange times we are living in, particularly during the pandemic. With the addition of a bit of Latin flavour and a healthy dose of Sax, the song most certainly hits the spot.

To conclude, all I can say is, Larry McCray, we can't imagine the Blues Without You.

ADAM KENNEDY

appears that Paul, apart from drums, plays all the other instruments and sings all lead vocals. So is this a touch of self-indulgence or did it come about due to the constraints of the pandemic? Most certainly it is the latter. Creativity has to have the space to blossom and in many ways Covid did indeed allow musicians the time to reflect and make the use of all the modern technologies to hand in home environments to make wonderful music. These nine songs and musical settings are a very fine examples of just that. Golden Sunset Roulette opens and weighs in at a hefty ten minutes plus whilst a further five are over four and a half minutes. Can you tell a story successfully in three minutes? Of course you can, just ask Lennon & McCartney, Goffin & King etc but we also have a deep desire to be taken on an extended journey and Prog Rock is such a vehicle. Get onboard here and enjoy.

GRAEME SCOTT

VIRGINIA AND THE SLIMS

BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

INDEPENDENT

The vintage 50's style cover art for this album is a reminder of less complicated times and lays the foundation for the overall tone and feel. It was recorded at Resident Egg Studios in Ashville, North Carolina. The first song sashays in with smooth swing vibe that introduces an epic Jump Blues and Swing album. The opening bars of the first song lay down a polished landing strip for Joanna Best's silky-smooth vocals on Let It Go. It is unusual to find such a fluid and serene voice in a Blues setting, but it blends extremely well with the overall gentleness of the album. Following this is a bit of a surprising segue into a Latin Cha Cha cover of Paul Simon's Take Me To The Mardi Gras but this flows straight back to Blues with laid the back Trace. Sugar Babe picks up the pace with a nod to the riffs of Sweet Home Chicago in the opening lines and The Way I Walk takes on a sensual slightly Rumba-esque feel. The only somewhat strange addition is When Will I Find Him? which feels out of place on this otherwise vibrant album. The Blues section of the album finishes off strongly with I'll Be Back Again. The instrumental line up has morphed through several iterations over the years with only vocalist and saxophonist James Kamp from the original band performing on this album. He is joined by Howie Neal on guitar, John Davis on bass and John Barrett on drums, all of whom gel into a solid and accomplished back line. Special and specific thanks is given in the credits to Hank Bones for being the Tea Boy. This album may not be a blues purists first choice, but it is well worth while if you are willing to dip your toe into slightly jazzier waters.

DIANNE DODSWORTH

FRED CHAPELLIER

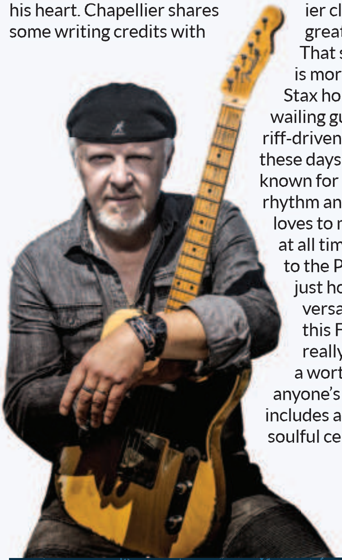
STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

DIXIE FROG RECORDS

Here's a real surprise. A blues-soul release from leading French blues label, Dixie Frog, featuring one of France's best-known and much-admired bluesmen. Chapellier has been a mainstay of French blues music for many decades, touring extensively in Europe and working alongside many

of the continent's greatest musicians. A fine guitarist with a penchant for laid-back rock-infused blues and soul, this twelve-track release highlights his capacity as a musician and songwriter with a love for Deep South soulful stuff at his heart. Chapellier shares some writing credits with his old Dixie Frog buddy, and long-time friend and recording partner, US soulman Billy Price. Price, of course, was frontman with the Roy Buchanan band in a previous life. Here his input is evident on many tracks and Chapellier clearly benefits greatly from it. That said, the album is more Memphis/Stax horn-fuelled than wailing guitar or lick and riff-driven, like all too many these days. Chapellier, known for his love of strong rhythm and good ole R&B, loves to mix it up a bit at all times. Straight to the Point, proves just how surprisingly versatile and rooted this French blues icon really is and will be a worthy addition to anyone's collection that includes a more tasteful, soulful centre.

IAIN PATIENCE



POPA CHUBBY

EMOTIONAL GANGSTER

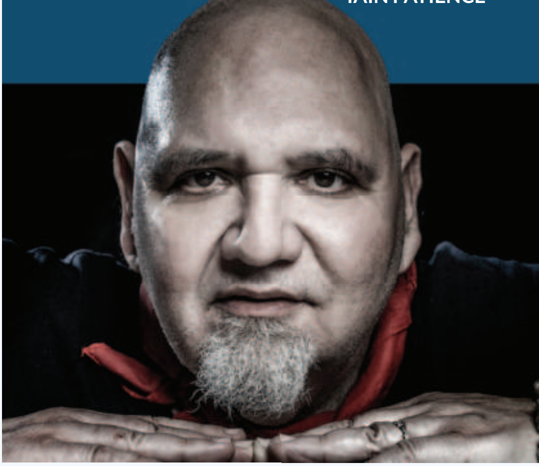
Dixie Frog Records

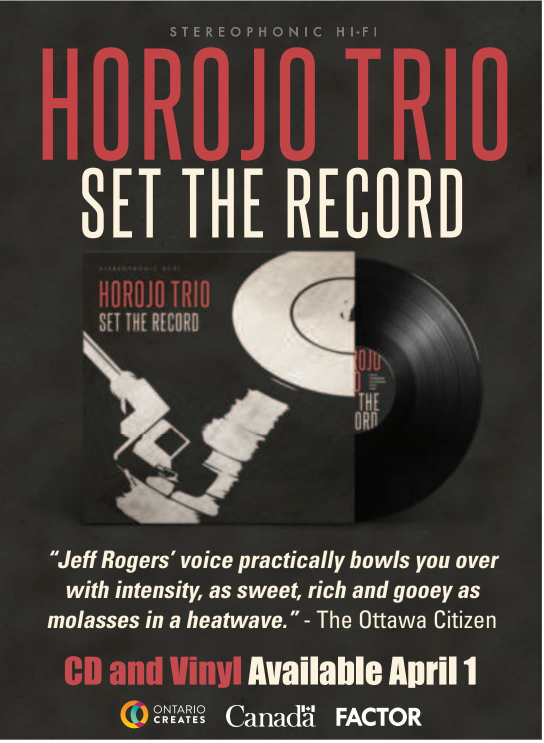
What's to be said about Ted that's not already been said? Answer: not much. Ted Horowitz, AKA Popa Chubby, is one of those raucous blues-rock souls that leaves you in little doubt about what he's likely to deliver. And this, his latest release, Emotional gangster, offers more of the same: blaring, pushy, in-your-face blues underpinned with a striking rock drive that simply never wanes or fails to demand a listener's attention.

As Chubby rips through the dozen tracks here, his fretwork is, pretty much as ever, to the fore and can't be overlooked. He's not a guy with the slowhand feel or the roaring earfuls of a Jimi Hendrix. Instead, he slips and slides along with some truly neat runs and riffs that somehow or other are invariably perfectly pitched for the material he delivers here. Chubby writes much of the material, as is normal these days, but also includes a few classic blues tracks with John Lee's Hoochie Cootchie Man and Elmore James' classic, Dust My Broom. Joined in his home-studio recording by James Ricci on harp on a few tracks, Emotional Gangster also features the wonderful keyboard work of New York's Dave Keyes, one of the USA's finest blues keys players.

Emotional Gangster is a fun album from a guy who, after fifty years in the blues business, is both an industry veteran and a welcome, self-assured musician who seldom truly surprises but with whom you always know just what you're getting.

IAIN PATIENCE





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